

1845 Edward Livingston



Mr. Clark's Convention SERMON.

• *May 30. 1745.*





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The *Advantages* and *Obligations* arising from the
Oracles of GOD committed to the Church and
its Ministry,

Represented in a

S E R M O N

Preached before the

M I N I S T E R S

Of the Province of the

Massachusetts-Bay in NEW-ENGLAND :

AT THEIR

Annual Convention,

IN

B O S T O N:

May 30. 1745.

By PETER CLARK, M. A.

Pastor of a Church in Salem-Village.

Ifa. viii. 16, 20. Bind up the Testimony, seal the Law among my Disciples.—To the Law and to the Testimony: If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them.

1 Cor. ix. 17. — A Dispensation of the Gospel is committed to me.—

B O S T O N: N. E.

Printed by J. DRAPER, for D. GOOKIN over against the Old-South-Meeting-House in Marlborough-Street. 1745.

At the Anniversary Convention of Ministers of the
Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in NEW-
ENGLAND; met at Boston, May 30. 1745.

Voted,

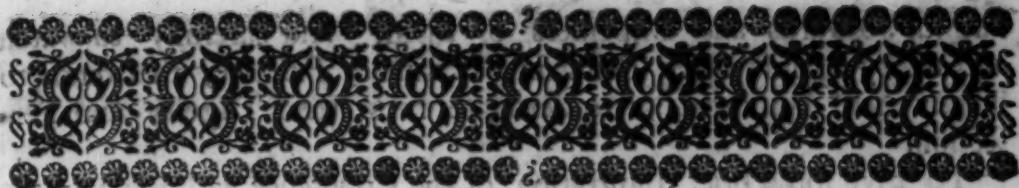
THAT Thanks be given to the Rev. Mr. PETER CLARK, for his Sermon preached before the Convention this Day: And that it is agreeable to the Convention that said Sermon be made Publick.

Attest. *Ebenr. Turell, Scriba.*

Advertisement.

THE Reader is desired to take Notice, that the several Paragraphs and Passages in the ensuing Sermon, which are distinguished by Crotchetts, are such as had been prepared, but for Brevities sake were either wholly omitted, or the Heads but briefly touch'd in the Delivery of the Sermon; but in this Publication of it 'tis tho't proper they should be inserted with their Enlargements, to render the Discourse more entire and better connected; and for this Reason 'tis hop'd they will not be unacceptable to the Readers.





Convention-S E R M O N.

ROMANS III. 1, 2.

What Advantage then hath the Jew? Or what Profit is there of Circumcision? Much every Way: Chiefly because that unto them were committed the Oracles of God.



Si it is not without a proper Concern and Thoughtfulness, Reverend Fathers and Brethren, that I have undertaken the Office assign'd me this Day (tho' the least worthy of your Number or Order) of being *as the Mouth of GOD* to those, whom he hath appointed by their stated Office, to be *his Mouth* unto his People; so I trust it has been and is my first and chief Aim (as it is meet) to approve myself to Him that *trieth the Heart*, and to speak as his Oracles shall direct and warrant: Next to this, I shall be ambitious of nothing more than doing the Part of a faithful Monitor, by *stirring up your pure Minds in way of Remembrance*. And the Words I have now read, I conceive to be pertinent and useful to this Purpose, as they may furnish out to us Matter of seasonable Reflections on this Occasion. My Design in Discoursing on them being to represent the great Advantage enjoyed by a People, in having the Oracles of GOD committed to them; and the great Obligations lying, on the Ministers of Religion (and on us as such), who are in a peculiar Manner constituted the Trustees of these sacred Oracles, to approve themselves the

B.

faithful

faithful Stewards and Dispensers of them, and carefully to watch and testify against every Thing in Doctrine or Practice, that tends to impair their Authority, or to derogate from their Dignity and Perfection.

To give some brief Illustration of the Coherence and Sense of the Words, let me observe, That the Apostle in the Course of his Argument, to convince the Jews of their being obnoxious to the righteous Judgment of GOD, equally with the Gentiles, by reason of their moral Transgressions, having spoken somewhat contemptibly of their external Privileges, in Comparison of, and abstracted from, inward vital Religion, (which should correspond thereunto, and without which they were of no Weight, as to the Purpose of their being accepted of GOD) in the concluding Words of the foregoing Chapter, *For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that Circumcision, which is outward in the Flesh: But he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and Circumcision is that of the Heart in the Spirit and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but of GOD:* Having I say, spoken thus diminutively of the Jewish Profession & Circumcision in a comparative Consideration, lest he should be misunderstood as casting a Slight on any Divine Institution or Form of Religion, as such, he takes care to explain himself in the Beginning of this Chapter, by replying to an Objection.

1. We have the Objection propounded, which might reasonably be expected from the Mouth of a Jew, zealous for the Honour of his Nation, his Religion and Law, which he might think too much vilified and disparaged by the Apostle's foregoing Discourse. *What Advantage then hath the Jew?* Hath the Jew no singular Advantage or Prerogative above the uncircumcised Gentiles? To what Purpose then are those magnificent Elegies which the Scripture bestows on the Jewish Nation, as the Seed of *Abraham* the special Friend and Favourite of the ALMIGHTY, a People near to GOD, and in Covenant with Him, a Kingdom of Priests, an holy Nation, and a peculiar Treasure above all People of the Earth? And, *What Profit is there of Circumcision?* Was not Circumcision an Ordinance of GOD, and a Token or Seal of the Covenant between Him and *Abraham's* Seed? But to what Purpose is it? What Advantage accrues by it, if Jews and Gentiles, the Circumcision and the Uncircumcision, stand so much upon a Level before GOD, and are equally liable to his condemning Justice?

2. The Apostle answers this Objection by Way of Concession, *First, more generally, Much every Way. Secondly, more specially, Chiefly because that unto them were committed the Oracles of GOD.*

First,

First, more generally, *Much every Way*: He is free to acknowledge that the Jews, in Regard of their Church-Privileges, had far greater Advantages than the Gentiles, both for Improvements in Piety and further Attainment of the Favour of GOD, and everlasting Happiness: Though these alone would not avail them to that Purpose. GOD will not accept a Jew to special Favour, meerly because he is a Jew, and hath a Form of Knowledge in the Law, or because he is Circumcised in the Flesh, unless he be inwardly and really, that which his Profession obliges him to be, circumcised in Heart and sanctified unto Obedience. Nevertheless, the Apostle is far from throwing Contempt on these external Jewish Privileges, he allows they were on the Account of 'em a People signally favour'd of GOD, and had every Way the Advantage of the Gentiles. They were prepar'd by the previous Motives of GOD's Will in the Predictions of the Prophets to entertain the REDEEMER at his coming, and privileged with the first Offer of His saving Benefits, so that Access to the Grace of the Gospel was made more easy to them than to the Gentiles, and they were more abundantly furnished with Means and Helps to make them Religious and Happy, which the poor Gentiles wanted, *for Salvation is of the Jews*. Therefore he grants that the Jews had the Prerogative, and that there was Profit in Circumcision (as it was a distinguishing Token of their Relation to GOD as his confederate People) and that *much every Way*.

[Hence, by the way, We may receive this useful Instruction, That tho' the Forms of Religion among a professing People, without the Life and Power of it, will avail nothing to Salvation, yet these outward Forms are by no Means, for that Reason, to be slighted and undervalued. The Scriptures, Ministry, Sacraments, a visible Profession, Church-Order and Fellowship belong to the outward Form of Religion, and of themselves will intitle no Man to GOD's gracious Acceptance, any more than Circumcision of old. Of what Profit or Advantage then are they to a People? Truly, much every Way, and we cannot be sufficiently thankful to GOD for them, as they are His instituted Means of introducing, maintaining and reviving the Power of Religion; and it is great Impiety and Ingratitude to GOD, for any, under Pretence of being more spiritual in Religion, to neglect or to think or speak slightly of these outward Forms.]

Let me further observe, This Concession of the Apostle refers to the Jews while they were a People in Covenant with GOD, and while the Ordinance of Circumcision stood in force; for since the Coming and Death of CHRIST, which has put an End to all the Ordinances of the

Law, Judaism and Circumcision are become not only unprofitable but noxious and detrimental to true Christianity, as the Apostle every where in his Epistles declares.

Secondly, More specially, he instances in one eminent Privilege of the Jewish Church, *Chiefly because that unto them were committed the Oracles of GOD.* Observe we here,

1. The Privilege instanced in, is, 'That the Jews had the *Oracles of GOD*, i. e. the sacred Scriptures of the Old-Testament, committed to them.'

2. The Eminency of this Privilege declared; he mentions it as their chief Advantage: *Chiefly, πρώτον, first*, not first in order of Reckoning, for he mentions no more in the following Verses, but in order of Dignity and Value, that is, the chief or principal: He reckons it the chief or most eminent among the Prerogatives of the Jewish Nation, that they had the *Oracles of GOD committed to them*. This being the main Subject of my intended Discourse, I shall endeavour more fully to illustrate it under this doctrinal Proposition, *viz.*

That it is a distinguishing Favour of GOD to a People, and ought to be valued by them as their chief Advantage and Prerogative, that they have the Oracles of GOD committed to them.

In speaking to this Point, I shall endeavour to open these several Particulars, and to shew, I. What is meant by the *Oracles of GOD*.

II. What by their being *committed*. III. To whom they are committed.

IV. That it is the *chief Advantage* and Prerogative of a People, or of the visible Church of GOD, that they have these Divine Oracles committed to them.

I. I am to shew what is meant by the *Oracles of God*. The Word signifies, the Speech or Voice of God: In the Old-Testament it is used Metonymically for the Holiest Place in the Tabernacle, and afterwards in the Temple termed the *Oracle*, in which were the Ark, the Mercy-Seat, and the Cherubims with their Wings stretched out upon it. Where GOD promised *Moses to meet and commune with him of all Things*, which he should give in Commandment to the Children of *Israel*. And whence *Moses*, when he went into the Tabernacle, is said to hear the Voice of one Speaking to him. Hence also, the Responses, given to the High-Priest when he ask'd Counsel by the *Urim* and

a 1 King. 6. 19. b Psal. 28. 3. c Exod. 25. 22. d Num. 7. 89.

Thummim, are usually term'd *Oracles*; and the Breast-plate of the High-Priest, in which were the *Urim* and *Thummim*, is rendred by the Greek Interpreters, *λόγια*. the Word here used in the Plural. But though this was a great Honour and Privilege vouchsafed to the *Israelitish* Nation till the full Settlement of their State under *David* and *Solomon*; since which Time, there is scarce any Thing said of it: Yet the *Oracles of GOD* in our Text, are not to be understood in such a restrained Sense, but as Comprehensive of every Word of GOD deliver'd unto Men, in what Way or Manner soever it be deliver'd, whether by Voice, Visions, Dreams, or Prophesy. For *GOD spake as at sundry Times, so in divers Manners to the Fathers by the Prophets*^a. And therefore the *Oracles of GOD* here said to be deliver'd to the Jewish Church, must intend the whole sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, as Interpreters generally agree; and particularly the Law of *Moses*, who (as *Stephen* faith) was *in the Church of Israel in the Wilderness and received the lively Oracles*, or the *Oracles from the Voice of the living GOD, to give unto them*^b. And some suppose (not without probable Ground, from the following Verses of the Chapter) that the Apostle might peculiarly have in his Eye, the Promises and Predictions of the *Messias*, which occur in the Writings of the Prophets, which were in the Custody of the Jews. And the Holy Scriptures of the New-Testament, are no less the *Oracles of GOD* than those of the Old; and are so term'd (if some good Interpreters mistake not) in two Places, namely, *Heb. 5. 12.* Where the inspired Writer of this Epistle, reproving the Christian *Hebrews* for their non-proficiency in the Doctrine of *CHRIST*, tells them they had need to be taught *the first Principles of the Oracles of GOD* i. e. the chief Heads of the Christian Doctrine: And the Apostle *Peter* gives that Direction, which in a special Manner concerns the authorized Teachers in the Church, *1. Pet. 4. 11.* *If any Man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of GOD.* At least the Thing intended by this Term is without all Doubt applicable to the Christian Doctrine in the sacred Records of the New-Testament. *CHRIST the Son of GOD* is now the great Oracle to Christians, by whom the Father hath *in these last Days, spoken to us*^c, and given us the clearest, and fullest Discovery of his Nature and Will; and commanded us by a Voice from the *Excellent Glory on the Mount*, *to bear his Beloved Son*^d; neither *Moses*, nor the *Prophets* were so well

^a *Heb. 1. 1.* ^c *Act. 7. 38.* ^f *Heb. 1. 2.* ^g *Matth. 17. 5.*

qualified

qualified to give forth a Revelation from GOD as the only begotten Son, who had seen his Face (as they never did) and lay in his Bosom. *No Man hath seen GOD at any Time* (saith the Evangelist ^b) *the only begotten Son, who is in the Bosom of the Father he hath declared him.* And his Doctrine was committed to Writing by *holy Men of GOD,* the holy Apostles and Evangelists, under the infallible Guidance and Influence of the Holy Spirit.

The Oracles of GOD then, (the Subject of our present Enquiry) are no other than the sacred Scriptures of both Testaments, as they contain a Revelation from GOD to the Children of Men: And Consideration of the Holy-Scriptures, as the Oracles of GOD, bespeaks the highest Reverence and Esteem of them, and leads us to take a View of those eminent Properties, which agree to them, as such, and serve highly to recommend them to our Regard: Such as their Excellency, their Perspicuity, their Infallibility, their Authority, and their Perfection or Sufficiency.

[First, Their Excellency and Importance. Things mean and vulgar are not expected from Oracles, but something great and uncommon, Things that have a Weight and Majesty in them to command our Attention: And do not the Holy Scriptures contain Matters of the greatest Weight and Moment? Hath not GOD therein *written to us the great Things of his Law, and Gospel?* We have Life and Death therein propounded to us; the eternal Counsels and Transactions between GOD the Father and the SON concerning our Redemption open'd, the Methods of divine Wisdom and Grace in reducing apostate Man to his original Subjection and Happiness by a Mediator unfolded, Life and Immortality bro't to Light, a future State of eternal Recompences clearly exhibited to our View; and what can be of greater Importance to Mankind than these Things? Hath he not written to us excellent Things in Counsels and Knowledge? Here are the best Maxims of Wisdom delivered, the choicest Instructions and Counsels, the wifest Rules and Precepts for the Government of our Tempers and Lives in every Relation and Capacity, in order to our attaining everlasting Happiness, even such as may be justly deemed worthy of, or becoming the Oracles of Heaven.

Secondly, Their Clearness and Perspicuity, which is the peculiar Excellency of the Divine Oracles, in Opposition to, or in Comparison of the Cloudiness and Obscurity of the Oracles of the Heathen,

^b Job, 1. 18. i Prov. 22, 29.

which

which were for the most Part deliver'd in mysterious, dark and ambiguous Expressions, that they might be capable of being applied to the Event about which they were consulted, whatsoever it were ; whereby they often deluded their blind Votaries : Of which there are many Instances that occur in History. On the contrary, the Oracles of the true GOD are plain, open, and intelligible. The Answers he gave (several Instances whereof are Recorded in Scriptnre) to those that inquired of him by *Urim* and *Tbummim*, were all clear, and free from Ambiguities, and double-Meanings, and gave a satisfactory Decision to the several Cases propounded. GOD hath not (he declares) *spoken in secret in a dark Place of the Earth*,^k as it seems the Pagan Deities affected to deliver their Oracles under a mysterious Secrecy ; but the *Wisdom of GOD* in the Scripture *cries without*, openly publickly, *in the chief Place of Concourse*, to make all Men see, and hear and understand ; *the Vision is made plain, that he may run, that readeth it*^l The Words of Wisdom are *all plain to him that understandeth*^m.

'Tis granted of all, that there are divers mysterious and intricate Passages that occur in these sacred Books, especially the Prophecies which the most acute Understanding is scarce able to penetrate into : Nevertheless all Things necessary to be believed and practised in order to Salvation, are intelligible and plain to the meanest Capacity, even to Children and Babes, who are capable of that *Knowledge of the holy Scriptures* which is sufficient *to make them wise unto Salvation*ⁿ. And thus (as one well observes) " In great and heavenly Wisdom, the SPIRIT of GOD hath thus temper'd his Writings, that they might neither be subject to Contempt thro' their Facility, nor be utterly neglected for their Obscurity ; and that the most refined Wits might there find Exercise, and yet the meanest Capacity likewise be plainly instructed to Salvation^o " The Scriptures, as Divine Oracles, are sufficiently clear in all the main and necessary Points of Faith and Salvation, otherwise they were not properly a Revelation, nor could they answer the End of a Revelation from GOD, with respect to the greatest Part of Mankind. They are called *a Light that shineth in a dark Place*^o. As nothing is more clearer than Light, which evidenceth itself to the Eye, so do the Scriptures to the Reason and Consciences of Men. If in the principal Points they be dark to any 'tis to such as love Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds are Evil : If, in

^k Isai 45. 19. 1 Prov. 1. 20, 21. Eph. 3. 9. Heb. 2. 2. ^m Prov. 8. 9.
ⁿ 2 Tim. 3. 15. ^o 2 Pet. 1. 19.

Matters less principal, there remains some Obscurity (as is confess'd) it is doubtless order'd with a wise Design that they might be better suited to all, learned and unlearned, wise and simple.

Thirdly, Absolute Certainty and *Infallibility*, is another Property that agrees to the Scriptures as divine Oracles; for if the holy Scriptures are no other than the Oracles of GOD (as we profess to believe) it necessarily follows, that whatsoever they testify and declare to us must be certainly and infallibly true, upon this indisputable Principle, that whatsoever the GOD of Truth is pleased to reveal and declare to us, is absolutely and infallibly true, and cannot be otherwise, for *it is impossible for GOD to lie*^p. The Oracles of the Heathen Gods were Vanities and Lies, and (as we have observed) often deceived those that had recourse to them; but the Oracles of the true GOD have an infallible Certainty in them, which may be absolutely depended on, without fear of being misled or danger of Error. That hyperbolical Commendation of the Counsel of *Abiathophel*, that it was as if a Man had enquired at the Oracle of GOD^q, (Which surely is not meant in respect of the Purity and Integrity of it, but in respect of that natural Wisdom and Sagacity he was endowed with, whereby he had such an insight into the Relations and Dependencies of Things, as enabled him to give such Advice, as scarce ever fail'd of Success, whereby he acquir'd the Reputation of a wise and trusty Counsellour) shews the superlative Esteem generally had of GOD for infallible Counsel and Direction. The Scriptures coming from the GOD of Truth, as His Oracles, with all the Evidence such a Revelation is capable of, afford us a sure and unerring Directory in all Parts of our Duty, much more satisfactory than either a transient Voice from Heaven, or a Message from the Dead could be^r. The Scriptures must needs be an infallible Rule because given forth by the Inspiration of the infallible Spirit, and cannot possibly misguide us either in Faith or Practice. They are absolutely true in themselves, and the Standard of all religious Truth, by the Help whereof we are directed to judge between Truth and Error.

Fourthly, Another Property of the Scriptures consider'd as the Oracles of GOD, is, their *Authority* or Power, being given forth from Him whose Power over us is absolutely Supream, and challenges the unlimited Subjection of our Souls and Consciences. It is no less than the Voice of GOD that speaks in the Scriptures to the Children of Men, and that speaks to them from Heaven, which *Voice once shooke*

^p Heb. 6. 18. ^q 2 Sam. 16. 23. ^r 2 Pet. 1. 18, 19. Luk. 16. 31.

the Earth, and will yet again shake not the Earth only, but also Heaven,^s unto which all Creatures in Heaven and Earth ought to pay a reverent Submission, *Lo ! he doth send out his Voice, and that a mighty Voice*^t. If the Word of a Superior, the Word of a King, carry Authority with it ; if (as Solomon saith ^u) *where the Word of a King is, there is Power*, to support his Authority and enforce the Observance of it, how much more Authority must we acknowledge in the Word of the Supreme Majesty of Heaven and Earth ? The Scriptures are called *the Word of the Kingdom*^w. They are not to be regarded merely as containing Matters of Advice or Counsel, but as the Dictates and Laws of an Almighty Sovereign, that have a binding Authority on the Conscience. Our Understandings must humbly submit to the Truths, our Wills to the Precepts of this Word of the Kingdom ; and in all Debates and Differences that arise about Matters of Religion, we are not to be determined by what this and the other great and learned Man saith, or by what another good & pious Man saith ; but by what the Oracles of GOD say ; Here we must acquiesce, hereunto we must ultimately appeal for the Decision of all Controversies in Religion. When we once hear what the Scripture saith for the Proof of any Point of Truth, or the Reproof of Errors, all Contention should issue in Silence and Peace ; for the Authority of Divine Oracles is incontestable.

Fifthly, The Perfection and Sufficiency of the Scriptures to all the Purposes of Religion, is another Property that belongs to them as the Oracles of GOD. When GOD vouchsaf'd to give forth oracular Responses of old, to those that consulted him by the Ordinance of *Urim and Thummim*, we find they were always full to the Point, and gave a perfect and satisfactory Resolution of the Case propos'd. The great Enquiry we are all concern'd in, as guilty fallen Creatures, is, *Wherewith shall we come before the Lord, and bow ourselves before the high GOD ?* How shall we Worship the GOD that made us, so as to be accepted of him, to obtain his reconciled Favour, and arrive at last to Salvation and Happiness in the Enjoyment of Him ? The Holy Scriptures, as the Oracles of Heaven, give us a full Resolution of this grand Inquiry to the great Ease and Satisfaction of our Consciences. They furnish out to us a sufficient and compleat Directory for our serving and glorifying GOD here, in order to eternal Happiness hereafter. This is the constant Doctrine of *Protestants*, and the main Pillar of the Reformation, that the

^s Heb. 12. 27. ^t Psal. 68. 33. ^u Eccl. 8. 4. ^w Matth. 13. 19.

Scriptures are, in themselves, a perfect and compleat Rule to guide us in all Matters of Faith and Obedience unto Salvation, that we have no need either of Jewish or Popish Traditions, which are so far from mending the Scriptures, that they do but corrupt and adulterate them. And since GOD intended the Scriptures to be a Rule of Faith, Worship and Obedience to his Church and People in this World, to guide them in the Way to eternal Life, we may rest assured, that in the estimate of divine Wisdom, *that* is sufficient that is warranted by Scripture, and more than *that* is Superstition.

These divine Oracles teach all Doctrines, necessary to be believed, and all Duty necessary to be observ'd, and so are *able to make us wise unto Salvation*, (which is the great End of a divine Revelation) and serve to make *the Man of GOD perfect, furnish'd unto all good Works*^x. And are abundantly sufficient in the ministerial Dispensation of them, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, and for the Edifying of the Body of CHRIST^y. All Institutions requisite and useful to those Purposes being therein appointed and prescrib'd. Those, therefore, who think it would be more Expedient for the Benefit and Advantage of Mankind, or of the Church of GOD, if any other Office or Ordinance were settled in it, besides those appointed in Scripture, do but shew themselves wise above what is written, or rather tax the Wisdom of GOD in not providing sufficiently for the Edification of the Church. The Scriptures are so perfect as to all the Purposes of a Rule of Religion, that we are forbidden to receive any other Doctrine in Addition to it. *Tho' we (faith the Apostle) or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that, (or besides that) we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*^z. Any other Gospel *besides* that which we have preached, not only any Doctrine which is contrary unto it, but that which is besides it, which is alien and foreign to it; not only what is a Contradiction to it, but what comes in competition with it: The Author of such a Doctrine, whosoever he be, is to be held *accursed*. Which speaks in the highest and strongest Terms the absolute Perfection of the sacred Oracles.

Thus having shewed what we are to understand by the Oracles of GOD, and what Respect we ought to bear to the Holy Scriptures considered as his Oracles, I proceed, as was propos'd,

^x 2 Tim. 3. 15, 17. ^y Eph. 4. 12. ^z Gal. 1. 8, 9.

II. To shew what is meant by their being *committed*. Two Things are especially intended by this Expression.

1. Their being *given from GOD*, and *received by Men*, that is, believed in as coming from GOD, and improved for their own Use and Benefit. [So the Word here used is sometimes render'd, *1 Tim. 3. 16. —Believed on in the World.*]

2. Their being *given and received as a Trust*, to be preserved pure and entire, and communicated for the Benefit of others, as the Greek Word is commonly construed, *concredited, committed or intrusted*: The Words *given* and *committed* in their general Sense are often promiscuously used as Terms equipollent: As when our Saviour saith, Unto whomsoever much is *given*, of him much shall be required, and unto whom Men have *committed* much, of him they shall ask the more^a. [And the Apostle Paul having said, GOD hath *given to us* the Ministry of Reconciliation, presently adds in Words to the same purpose, he hath *committed to us* the Word of Reconciliation^b.] Nevertheless this latter Term, as it implies the former, so it hath something more peculiar in its Signification. It is not barely said, the Oracles of GOD were *given forth* to the Jews, but *committed to them*. They were not only a *Gift*, but a *Trust*: In the former Respect they are to be consider'd as a singular Favour and Privilege confer'd on them by Divine Grace, obliging them to thankfulness, an invaluable Treasure they were possess'd of for their own Use and Improvement: In the latter, they are consider'd as a Charge, inferring an Obligation upon them faithfully to observe them in their own Persons, and to transmit them in their Purity to others that come after them.

And this Method the Wisdom of GOD hath pitch'd upon for the Conveyance of the Revelation of His Will to Mankind. When GOD saw it needful, and had graciously purposed in Himself to make such a Revelation to Men, as is contained in the Holy Scriptures, there are but two Ways supposeable in which such a Revelation could have been made; either that GOD should reveal Himself to every particular Person, and so in every Age be making new Revelations of Himself, as Men successively come into the World: Or else that GOD should make this Revelation in some certain Age or Ages, to some particular Person or Number of Persons, whom He should single out and qualify for that Purpose, furnished with authentick Credentials, and by them communicate it to others, accompanied with sufficient Evidence to convince them of

^a Luk. 12. 48. ^b ² Cor. 5. 28. 19

its divine Original, and so to be transmitted to future Ages. The former Method of immediate Revelation to every Individual, seems ingruous to the Wisdom of GOD's ordinary Dispensation to Mankind, and unsuitable to the Nature of Man, as he is a rational free Agent in a State of Tryal ; and that as it carries in it such over-bearing Evidence as leaves but little Room for the Exercise of Reason and Judgment, Deliberation and free Choice, which yet are requisite to all Acts of Religion and Virtue, which must be rational and voluntary (that they might be accepted of GOD as the Obedience and Homage of reasonable Creatures,) and such they cannot be, so far as they proceed from over-ruling Necessity and Constraint ; and therefore it is the latter Method that GOD has seen meet in his Wisdom to make Choice of, for revealing Himself to Mankind from the Beginning, by raising up some extraordinary Persons, at several Seasons, and by various Ways, imparting Revelations to them, not only for their own Direction and Improvement, but intrusting them also with the Conveyance and Communication of them to others, who are equally concern'd therein. Thus it was in the patriarchal Age before the Law of *Moses*, and the committing the Word to Writing, GOD raised up the holy Patriarchs successively, to whom he committed the unwritten Revelations of his Will, as he saw needful for the Instruction of the Church in that Period. *Abraham*, in particular, is represented to us in this Capacity, when he is thus characterized by the Author to the *Hebrews*, *He that received the Promises*. He received them not only for his own Use as a particular Believer, as the Ground and Encouragement of his own Faith, Hope, Patience and Obedience in his Walk with GOD, but as a publick Trustee for the like Benefit of others, to be communicated to the Church of GOD in his Day, and to be faithfully preserv'd as a sacred and precious Treasure and transmitted to his Posterity. So *Moses* afterward received from GOD the *lively Oracles*, who gave them to the Fathers of the Jewish Church for the Direction of their Faith and Obedience, to whom also they were committed as a sacred *Depositum*, to be conveyed to future Generations. Which brings me to the Third Head of my Discourse, to shew you,

III. *To whom* the Oracles of GOD are committed. To this I shall answer in two Things, *First*, To the visible Church in general. *Secondly*, To a particular Order of Men settled in the visible Church,

who are under a special solemn Charge obliging them to Faithfulness in communicating and dispensing them to others.

First, To the *visible Church in general*. The Church of GOD in the World is the Repository of this sacred Treasure, 'tis his House on Earth in which this Light is set up, from whence the Nations of the Earth might be illuminated. Accordingly the Prophet foretelling the Accession of the Gentiles to the Church, represents them as repairing to the House of GOD as to an Oracle for Direction in his Worship and Service, saying, *Let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of his Ways, &c.*^d. This is the eminent Prerogative of the visible Church, both Jewish and Christian, that the Oracles of GOD are committed to them. And,

First of all, to the Jewish Church, which is immediately refer'd to in our Text. 'Twas indeed a great Honour and Favour done to the Nation of the Jews, that GOD was pleased to distinguish them with the Revelations of his Will, in various extraordinary Ways imparted to them ; and that his Oracles were deposited among them. For as to the Accounts given us of the Oracles of the *Sybils* among the Heathen, which some hold to be of divine Original, they are justly look'd upon by most as uncertain and fabulous, at least interlaced with a great deal of Fiction ; so that both their Original & Genuineness are much contested among the Learned : But the undoubted Oracles of GOD were lodged in the Hands of the Jews, to them they were first given by Inspiration. All the inspired Penmen of the Books of Scripture being taken from among this distinguished Nation, unless the Book of *Job* in the Old Testament, and *Luke* in the New, be excepted, for which Exception yet there is no certain Authority.

The Books of the Old Testament were delivered to the Jews with certain Marks and Evidences of their being divinely inspired, without which they admitted none into the sacred Canon, as appears by their rejecting the *Apocrypha*, and not looking on them as any Part of Canonical Scripture : But the Canonical Books (as they are called) were always received and preserved by them with the Respect and Veneration due to the Oracles of Heaven. And whilst they continued the visible Church of GOD, they were faithful Guardians and Conservators of this sacred Treasure. { And they have been remarkable for their exact Care in this Matter, especially from the Days of *Ezra*. The *Masorites*, who were a Sett of Men among them employed on

purpose to write out Copies of the Scriptures, and to teach the original Hebrew Language, and to preserve its Purity, were extream nice and critical in numbring the Verses, Words and Letters of every Book, and marking out which was the middle Verse and Letter in each Book *; and how trifling soever this Sort of Criticism seems to be, yet 'tis not to be doubted but Divine Providence design'd it, as the Means of securing the Letter of the Hebrew Text from being corrupted. And 'tis very observable, that tho' our Saviour often reproves the Jews for their corrupt Traditions, by which they made void the Commandments of GOD, yet he never reproves them for corrupting the Text of the Old Testament, which he would not have fail'd to have done, had they been guilty of such Impiety, but in all his Disputes with them, he sends them back to the Scriptures: To these he appeals for the Proof of his Divine Mission as the *Messias*, *Search the Scriptures* (saith he to the Jews) — *for they are they which testify of me* ^o. By which he acknowledged the Purity and Authenticknes of those Scriptures, as the supreme Rule and Judge of all Controversies in Religion.] Thus (we may conclude) the Jews were faithful to their Trust as the *Christian's Library-keepers*.

From them are the ancient Oracles transmitted pure and entire into the Christian Church, which consists of the Gentile Nations, and succeed the Jewish in all their substantial Rights and Privileges; being grafted in among the Jews into their own Olive-tree, they partake with them of the Root and Fatness of the Olive-tree ^o; and enjoy this particular and eminent Advantage equally with them, of having the Oracles of GOD committed to them. *So from Zion went forth the Law and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem* ^e. The Apostles carried the Sound of it, from Jerusalem to the Ends of the Earth; and this is the sole Foundation on which the Christian Church is erected, *for we are built upon the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets* (i. e.) the Scriptures of the Old and New-Testament, JESUS CHRIST himself being the chief Corner Stone ^h. [The Mystery of our Redemption by CHRIST is not only by the Preaching of the Apostles, but by the Scriptures of the Prophets, according to the Commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all Nations for the Obedience of Faith ⁱ.] And in this Respect the Christian Church has the Advantage of the Jewish, that the sacred Canon which is committed to us, is much more enlarg'd,

* Vid. Dr. Prideaux Connect. of the History of the Old and New-Testament. Part 1st. Book v.

e John 5. 31. f Rom. 11. 17. g Isai. 2. 3. h Eph. 2. 20. i Rom. 16. 26.

by

by the Accession of the Writings of the Evangelists, and Apostles to those of the Law and the Prophets ; and by this Means their Oracles are become more plain and intelligible, instructive and useful to us, than otherwise they would have been ; a great deal of Light being reflected on them by the Scriptures of the New-Testament, we have now the clearest, and fullest Revelation of GOD's Will in these sacred Volumes, wherein Vision and Prophecy is sealed up and establish'd : Whence we are furnish'd with the most compleat Rule of Religion. To these we are now directed, even *to the Law and to the Testimony* ; to the Law and Gospel, as our standing Oracle, to be consulted in all Matters of Faith, Worship and Practice.

These divine Oracles may in some Respects be said to be committed to all the several Members of the visible Church, to whom they are made known, and who profess and reverence them as proceeding from GOD, being obliged hereby to a faithful Observance of them in their own Practice, improving them for their Direction in the Way of Holiness and Salvation : They are the Trust or Talent of which every one must give an Account to GOD ; and those especially who are vested with any Authority over others, Private or Publick. Servants and Magistrates are intrusted with them, not only for their own Observance, but with a special Charge to promote and propagate the Knowledge and Observance of them to others, according to the Power of their respective Places. [Parents have them in Charge to instruct their Household, *Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy Children*, (faith Moses ^k) and he finishes his Testimony to the Children of *Israel* with this solemn Charge, *Set your Hearts to all the Words which I testify among you this Day : Which ye shall command your Children to observe to do all the Words of this Law*]. And the civil Magistrate in the visible Church, is so far intrusted with these sacred Records, as that he is oblig'd to take care that the Knowledge of them shculd be spread and propagated among the People, by countenancing and protecting the Ministers of Religion, and by his Authority and Influence to preserve the Esteem and Reverence due to them as Divine Oracles ; after the Example of *Jehosephat, Hezekiah and other pious Kings of Judah*. Thus GOD establish'd a Testimony in Jacob, and appointed a Law in Israel, *which be commanded our Fathers*, (faith the devout Psalmist) that *they should make them known to their Children, that the Generation to come might*

^k Deut. 6. 7. 1 Deut. 32. 46.

know

know them, even the Children that should be born; who should arise and declare them to their Children, &c. ^m. And thus in every successive Age of the Church, all the Members of it, are in their several Places concern'd in this sacred Trust, to make the best Improvement of it themselves, and to transmit and propagate it to Posterity.] But I add,

Secondly, There is a particular Order of Men settled in the visible Church, to whom these sacred Oracles are in a more peculiar Manner committed, and who are under a special solemn Charge, obliging them to faithfulness in communicating and dispensing them to others. Ever since GOD hath had a Church in the World, he hath made Choice of some particular Persons to officiate in it, as Teachers and Ministers of holy Things. I have briefly observ'd it already of the patriarchal Age, while the Church of GOD was in the Families of the faithful, and when the Seed of *Israel* were grown into a Nation, and form'd into an Ecclesiastical State, by the Laws and Ordinances deliver'd to them by the Ministry of *Moses*, GOD was pleas'd to make choice of the Tribe of *Levi*, and particularly the Priests of the Family of *Aaron*, to be employed not only in sacred Rites, particular to the Mosaiac Dispensation, but also in Teaching the People the Knowledge of GOD's Will.

The Design of their sacred Office is well express'd by *Moses*, in blessing the Tribe of *Levi*, *They shall teach Jacob thy Judgments, and Israel thy Law*: *They shall put Incense before thee, and whole burnt Sacrifice upon thine Altar*. They were appointed not only to be Sacrificers, but publick Instructors of the People, and to that end he prays to GOD, *Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy One* ⁿ. Which, tho' in its primary and literal Sense, it refers only to the High-Priests, yet by Way of Accommodation may be extended to the whole sacred Order, as a Prayer for *Illumination* and *Perfection*, (the true import of the *Urim* and *Thummim*) to be imparted to them, that they may be endow'd with Knowledge and Integrity, that they may be both *faithful Men*, and *able also to teach others*; the necessary Qualifications of publick Teachers in the Church. And this moral Part of the Priest's Office, whereby they were obliged to instruct the People in the Knowledge of the divine Oracles, GOD ever gave the Preference to; and for their unfaithfulness in this, he threatens to deprive them of the other Part of their Office,

^m Psal. 78. 5, 6. ⁿ Deut. 33. 8, 10.

which

which was more advantageous to themselves. *Because thou hast rejected Knowledge*, (saith GOD to the Priest in the Prophet *Hosea*,^o) *I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no Priest to me.* q. d. Because thou hast been negligent in thine Office, as a Teacher, I will no more accept thee as a Sacrificer. To the like Purpose he declares by the same Prophet, that he *desired the Knowledge of GOD more than burnt-Offerings*^p.

The main Design therefore, of the Institution of this Order of Men, was, that the Divine Oracles of the Old-Testament, being committed unto them; they might apply themselves to the diligent Study of them, and faithfully instruct the People out of them, in the right Knowledge of GOD and his Will; as it is represented by the Prophet *Malachi*, *The Priests Lips* (faith he^p) *should* (by the Obligation of his Office) *keep Knowledge*, not only his Head, his Memory, or his Heart should keep it for his own Use; but his *Lips*, for the use of the People, who were to *seek the Law at his Mouth*; *for he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts*, authoriz'd and impowered by him who has the sovereign Power over all, to deliver his Messages to them.

And in this part of their Office all Gospel Ministers are the true Successors of the Priests of old, as Teachers, tho' not as Sacrificers. All Sacrifice and Oblation being made to cease, by Means of the one all-sufficient Sacrifice of CHRIST our great High Priest, there is now a *Change made* of the *Priesthood*, and *Law* of the Old-Testament by the Dissolution of the Mosaic *Æconomy*^q. And our Lord JESUS by virtue of his Royal Priesthood, and of the fulness of Power committed to him, has erected a new Dispensation of Religion, perfective of the former, and has put the Affairs of the Church under a new Regulation; and having given forth a new and compleat Revelation of GOD's Will, contain'd in the Books of the New-Testament, He hath instituted a new Order of Men, who have the same Trust in general lodg'd in their Hands: The Dispensation of the Oracles of GOD, being still committed unto them. Of which Order some were extraordinary Officers, as the *Apostles*, and *Evangelists*, who first receiv'd the Oracles of the New-Testament by immediate Commission and Inspiration, who were furnish'd with Gifts peculiar to them, and requisite to the first gathering, and founding of the Christian Church: But the ordinary standing Officers of the Church,

^o *Hos. 4. 6. Chap. 6. 6. p Mal. 2. 7. q Heb. 7. 12.*

are Pastors and Teachers, call'd and set apart to their Office, and put in Trust with the Ministry of the Word, by the mediate Agency of the Church, and its Ministry, under certain Rules and Limitations, prescrib'd by the Apostles. Both the one, and the other consider'd in their general Character, as Ministers of Religion, are intrusted with the divine Oracles both of the Old-Testament and the New; that is, with the whole Revelation of GOD in the Holy Scriptures; and are under very solemn Obligations to Faithfulness in the Dispensation of them. Hence we so often read of the Word of Reconciliation being committed to the Ministers of the Gospel, of their being put in Trust with the Gospel, and having the glorious Gospel of the blessed GOD, committed to their Trust; of their being *Stewards of the Mysteries of GOD*, &c. And Paul charges *Timothy*, and in him all Gospel Ministers to *keep that which is committed to his trust*; and in other Words, to *hold fast the form of sound Words*, i. e. the Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, and to keep the good Thing that is committed to him, by the *Holy Ghost*; and gives him, moreover, Direction to *commit the same to those whom he should ordain to the Ministry*.

From all which it is evident, that the Ministers of the Gospel have a special concern in the *Holy Bible*, as containing the Oracles of GOD: They are concern'd in it as a great and sacred Trust, in a very peculiar, and solemn Manner committed unto them: They are appointed to be the Conservators of this great Treasure of the Church of GOD, and the faithful Dispensers of it. They are to preserve and vindicate the Authority, the Purity, and Perfection of the Holy Scriptures, against whatever is set up in Opposition thereto, or comes in Competition therewith. They are intrusted with the Dispensation of the *Doctrines* of Scripture, the great Truths of Divine Revelation, which are necessary to be known and believ'd in order to Salvation. They have the Charge of Souls committed to them, whom they are to feed with good Knowledge and Understanding, the sound and wholesome Doctrines of the Scripture. They are also intrusted with the Administration of the *Laws* of Holy Scripture, the Laws of CHRIST's Kingdom, in the Government of the Church in admitting Members into it, qualify'd according to the Rules of the Word; and in the Exercise of Discipline, in administering Reproofs and Censures for the Reformation of Offenders, and for preserving the Purity of

¹ 2 Cor. 5. 19. ¹ Thes. 2. 4. ¹ Tim. 1. 11. ¹ Cor. 4. 1. ³ 1 Tim. 6. 20.
² Epist. 1. 13, 14; Chsp. 2. 2.

the Church, and the Honour of its Profession. For all which Purposes of their sacred Office, they must take all their Measures from the Oracles of GOD. The Apostle acquaints *Timorby*, that the End of his Writing his first inspir'd Epistle to him, was, that he might *know how he ought to behave himself in the House of GOD* : And this is the End of all the inspired Writings, as he elsewhere declares. *That all Scripture is given by Inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, &c. that the Man of GOD, the Gospel-Minister may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works, unto all the Duties of his sacred Function* .

In the Discharge of this great Trust, Ministers have great need of Knowledge and Wisdom, Vigilance and Fidelity : Their Office requires superiour Attainments in Knowledge, that they should be thoroughly vers'd in the Scriptures, and understand well the Sense of them, how else can they approve themselves the faithful Dispensers of the Doctrines and Laws contain'd in them ? And a great deal of Wisdom is requisite to enable them to make a right Application of the Word to particular Cases and Persons. They should have their spiritual Senses exercised to discern between Good and Evil, Truth and Error, and to put a Difference between the Precious and the Vile; and to measure all Things, Opinions, and Practices by the Rules of the Word : Zeal and Fidelity is also requisite to their resolute adherence to the Truth and Purity of the Scriptures, in Opposition to Errors and Corruptions. But this shall suffice for the third Head :

I come now in the last Place to shew,

IV. That it is *the chief Advantage or Prerogative of a People or the visible Church of GOD*, that they have these Divine Oracles committed to them. This is often commended in Scripture as a very peculiar and distinguishing Privilege. *Moses often reminds Israel of the singular Honour GOD put upon them, in delivering his Oracles to them from Mount Sinai* : He bids them enquire of former Ages and distant Places, from one Side of Heaven to the other, and they should find nothing to compare to this great and wonderful Thing, that never did any People hear the Voice of GOD speaking to them in such a Manner as they did ; that out of Heaven He made them to hear his Voice, that he might instruct them ; he tells them that the Laws and Statutes given them of GOD, were so Excellent, so Wise and Righteous

that nothing could contribute more to make them great, and raise their Reputation in the Esteem of the Nations about them, than their strict Adherence to them ^w. And tho' GOD doth not now speak to us in so sensible a Manner, with such terrible Manifestations of his Glory, and 'tis a Mercy to us that he doth not; yet he doth as truly speak to us from Heaven, and in a more heavenly Manner by his Son, in the Oracles of the New Testament ^x. Moses teaches them to set an high Estimation on the Laws and Ordinances of GOD given them, as an Inheritance peculiar to them, the most rich and valuable they could be posses'd of, and to transmit the same to their Children after them with an honourable Memorial, Moses *commanded us a Law, even the Inheritance of the Congregation of Jacob* ^y. And the holy Psalmist represents it as a distinguishing Favour to Israel, and a peculiar Argument of Praise to GOD, that *he shewed his Word unto Jacob; his Statutes and his Judgments unto Israel: He hath not dealt so with any Nation; and as for his Judgments they have not known them* ^z. On the same Account a People are pronounced *blessed* (peculiarly so) *that know the joyful Sound, proclaiming a blessed Liberty to them, that if it be not their own fault, they may walk continually in the Light of GOD's Countenance* ^a.

If then the Church of Israel had so much the Preheminence above other Nations, in having the Oracles of the Old Testament committed to them, What a transcendent Privilege does the Church of the New Testament enjoy in the Revelation of the SON OF GOD, wherein those Oracles are explain'd and fulfilled? Our Saviour speaks of it as a blessed Advantage, *Blessed are your Eyes* (said He to his Disciples) *for they see, and your Ears for they hear: For verily I say unto you, that many Prophets and righteous Men have desired to see those Things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those Things which ye hear, and have not heard them* ^b. There was a greater deal of Glory in the Mosaic Dispensation, but (as the Apostle faith) *even that which was made Glorious, had no Glory in this Respect, by reason of the Glory that excelleth in the New-Testament Dispensation and Ministry* ^c. Their Oracles were as Candle-light, signified by the Golden Candlestick in the Sanctuary, *a Light that shined in a dark Place*: Ours are as Day-light, more clear and extensive, the Sun of Righteousness being risen as the Light of the World, spreading out his healing Beams far and near. The Advantages of having these divine Oracles committed

^w Deut. 4. 32, 33, 36. & Ver. 6, 8. ^x Heb. 12. 25. ^y Deut. 33. 4. ^z Psal. 147. 19, 20. ^a Psal. 89. 15. ^b Matt. 13. 16, 17. ^c 2 Cor. 3. 10.

to us are greater than can be express'd. I am very sensible therefore had I made this alone the Subject of my Discourse, I must have left it imperfect: I shall therefore content myself with some brief touches on these *Three Heads*, to shew the singular Advantages and Prerogatives of a People favour'd with the Light of Divine Oracles, *First*, In respect of the Deficiency of natural Light. *Secondly*, In respect of the true Interest of a People, temporal, spiritual and eternal. *Thirdly*, In respect of divers concomitant Privileges.

[*First*, In respect of the *Deficiency of the Light of Nature* to guide us to our Duty and Happiness. 'Tis evident from the Reason and Experience of Mankind, that the meer Light of Nature is insufficient to discover those Truths concerning GOD, and teach us those Duties towards GOD, which it is highly necessary we should know and do, in order to Salvation and Happiness. How deplorable is the Condition of the Heathen World in this Regard, who have no other Light to guide them in Matters of Religion, than that of Nature? To whom all is dark beyond this World, and who have no Hope beyond Death and the Grave; for being Aliens from the Common-wealth of *Israel*, and Strangers to all divine Revelation, they are *without GOD* and *without CHRIST* in the World, *having no Hope*. Natural Light it is true, teaches many Things concerning GOD and our Duty; but it leaves us at a sad losf about those Things which it chiefly concerns us to know in this our fallen degenerate State. Without a Revelation from GOD the Light of Reason and Conscience serves rather to torment than to satisfy, 'tis insufficient to give us right and clear Apprehensions of the only true GOD, the supream Object of all religious Worship, it does indeed discover the Existence of a GOD, and several divine Perfections which may be trac'd out in the Works of Creation; but the wisest of the Heathen, and the greatest Masters of Reason had but confus'd and dark Conceptions of the divine Nature. The Apostle tells us that *the World by Wisdom*, by the highest Improvement of natural Light, *knew not GOD*^d; and no doubt he had just Reason for the Remark, which he elsewhere makes concerning the Heathen in general, and their Philosophers in particular, that as to the Things of GOD, they *became vain in their Imaginations, and their foolish Heart was darkened, that professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and changed the Glory of the incorruptible God, into an Image made like to corruptible Man, &c.*^e. It seems the learned Men at

^d 1 Cor. 1. 21. ^e Rom. 1, 21, 22, 23.

Athens needed to be taught what one would think the meanest reasonable Creature should blush to be found ignorant of, that the *Godhead was not like to Gold, or Silver, or Stone, graven by Art or Man's Device* : We that are brought up under the clear Light of the Gospel, are scarce capable of conceiving what gross Ignorance of the Things of GOD, the Light of Nature, unassisted by divine Revelation, would leave Men unto ; and therefore are no competent Judges of the extent of the Powers of Reason in Matters of Religion, The Heathen were under great Darkness and Error concerning many of the divine Perfections, the Knowledge whereof is fundamental to that Worship and Service we owe to our Maker. They grossly err'd concerning the Unity of GOD, whilst they held a plurality of Gods to whom they perform'd divine Homage, *Gods many and Lords many* : Concerning his Spirituality in representing him by Images ; concerning his Purity and Holiness in ascribing humane Passions and Vices to their Gods ; and consequently had erroneous Conceits about the Justice and other rectoral Perfections of the suprem^{an} Governour and Judge of this World, and had no distinct Knowledge of his Grace and Mercy to Sinners ; and without some clearer Discoveries of these divine Perfections, than the meer Light of Nature affords, how could Men pay to Him that religious Veneration and Worship that is due to Him on the Account of his superlative Excellencies, and his relation to Men, as their Creator, Ruler and Benefactor.

Again, the whole Mystery of our Redemption by JESUS CHRIST, his Incarnation, Death and Sufferings for us, is intirely super-natural ; neither the Understanding of Men or Angels could have found it out, till it pleased GOD, to bless his Church with the Revelation of it. What an unspeakable Advantage have we then by the Scriptures, wherein this Mystery of GOD's Will, which had been kept hid from Ages and Generations, is so clearly open'd and revealed to us ? 'Tis by the Scripture only Men are led to the right Knowledge of the *only true GOD and JESUS CHRIST whom be hath sent*.

There are several Articles that depend on the Doctrine of Redemption, necessary to be known and believed, in order to our Recovery from that State of Sin and Death we are fallen into, of which, yet, the Light of Nature makes not the least Discovery. It discovers nothing of the Method of a Reconciliation with an offended GOD ; or, how a guilty Sinner may obtain the Pardon of his Sins ; or, whether

GOD will pardon Sin at all ; or, what Sins, or in what Way, or on what Terms he will pardon them ; or, how a polluted Sinner may be cleansed and sanctified from his moral Defilement. It teaches nothing of the Nature, Necessity, and Means of Regeneration ; fallen Nature under Conscience of Guilt and Impunity has, indeed, some Sense of the Necessity of a Mediator in approaching the most holy and pure Majesty of GOD, but the only acceptable Way of coming to GOD by JESUS CHRIST lies beyond the Discovery of natural Light ; and it is intirely insufficient to discover to us eternal Life, or a blessed Immortality after Death, with any Degree of Evidence, to the Satisfaction of an inquisitive Mind ; these are all Doctrines peculiar to revealed Religion, and yet of the utmost Importance to the Comfort and Happiness of Men.

Let me further add, we could never by the Light of Nature be directed to the right Way of Worshipping GOD, to his acceptance, therefore the Heathen wandered so grossly in their Superstitious Rites of Worship, many of which were highly absurd, yea, impious, abominable and injurious to GOD's Honour, because they had no authentick Revelation of GOD's Will, beyond the light of Nature : And it depends on the Will and Pleasure of the Lawgiver to declare what Worship he will accept, that it may be performed as an Act of Obedience ; and since the Worship he has instituted, and which alone is acceptable to him has Relation to the Work of our Redemption by CHRIST ; and since it depends on a positive Law, in the very Nature of it, it transcends the Discovery of natural Light : In all these respects we see what Advantage we have by the Holy Scriptures for giving Satisfaction in the most important Concerns of Religion, above those who are left only to the Guidance of Natural Reason.

And then as to moral Duties, tho' Nature's Light is of good Use here ; yet in many Instances it is extreamly deficient. Natural Reason unenlightned is too dimlighted to discover the full Extent and Latitude of the Law of Nature ; and even in those Duties that are manifest by the Light of Nature, 'tis only the outward Work that is chiefly regarded : The Apostle observes, the Gentiles shew the *Work of the Law* written in their Hearts. The external *Work of the Law*, or the outward Acts of Virtue and Vice, are indeed discernible by Natural Light, as they are beneficial or hurtful to Societies ; but the inward Disorders of the Heart, the workings of Pride,

Malice, Covetousness, Lust, are little observed by the generality of Men, so as to condemn themselves for them as Transgressors of the natural Law, who have no other Light to guide them in judging of these Things than that of Nature; and consequently they must be very defective in the Knowledge and Practice of those Duties that relate to the inward Rectitude and Purity of the Mind, or consist in the inward Acts of loving GOD with all our Hearts, worshipping him in Spirit, the hearty Love of our Neighbour, Humility of Mind, Chastity, Temperance, and the like: So that a Revelation of our Duty from GOD is very needful to clear up, more fully, the Dictates of natural Light, and to supply its defects, and to teach us our Duty in the whole compass of it.

Once more, let me observe, That supposing the Law of Nature could give us the Knowledge of our Duty in the fullest Extent, yet it is very defective in the proper Enforcements of it. The Approbation and Reproaches of a natural Conscience, on the doing Good or Evil, and the fear of human Laws are found, by the long Experience of Mankind, too weak to over-rule the corrupt Byas of Man's Nature to Evil. The Motives to Obedience taken from the Majesty and Authority of the Lawgiver, the Compassion of a Redeemer, the Promises of Mercy, Pardon and Salvation to the penitent and obedient, a future Judgment, Heaven, and Hell, are all proper to divine Revelation, or at least if any of these may be traced by the glimmering Light of Nature, they are more fully clear'd up in the Holy Scriptures, and represented in their proper Light and Force.

In Consideration therefore of the Deficiency of the Light of Nature in these and many other Instances, it ought to be esteemed the greatest Mercy of GOD to Mankind, that he is pleased to vouchsafe them a Revelation of his Will, to make up those Deficiencies, and to help them out of those Entanglements and perplexing Scruples about Matters of the highest Moment, which it is not in the Power of frail Reason ever to extricate them from, without the Assistance of such a Revelation; and to be a sure and unerring Guide to them in all Matters of Faith, Worship and Practice, in order to everlasting Happiness. And the Advantages which a People enjoy who are blessed with this Revelation in the Oracles of the Holy Scriptures (above those who having no other Guide then the dim Light of Nature, are left to grope in the dark with respect to GOD and another World, their Duty, and Happiness) can never be sufficiently prized.

Secondly,

Secondly, If we respect the *true Interest of a People*, temporal, spiritual and eternal, their having the *Oracles of GOD* committed to them will appear to be an unspeakable Advantage.

1. This will appear with respect to their temporal Interest, not only as the *Holy Scriptures* direct to a sure Method for obtaining the *Favour of Almighty GOD*, the *Sourse of all our Happiness*, temporal and eternal; not only as they plainly State the *Terms of a People's temporal Welfare*, and propound the *Condition upon which GOD has covenanted and promised to prosper and bleſs them in their outward Interest*, but as the *Laws and Rules* contained in the *Oracles of GOD*, are wisely calculated for the *good of civil Societies*, and conduce to the *establishment of Order and Peace*, and all the *social Virtues*, on which the *flourishing State of a People* depends. *Majestates and Rulers* are furnished with the *best Rules and Maxims of Government* from these *sacred Pandictſ*; and tho' the *political Laws of the Jews* are not *binding to a Christian Common-Wealth*, yet so far as they are founded on a *moral Equity*, they are still of great *Use to direct Rulers in framing Laws for the Government of a Community*: There is no compare between the celebrated *Laws of Lycurgus* and *Solon*, the *anciently fam'd Law-givers of the Spartan and Athenian Common-wealths*, and the *Laws of Moses* given to the *Jews*, for *Wisdom and Purity, Integrity and Perfection, and Subserviency to the People's Interest and Benefit*, as the *Learned* have observed.* *Divers unnatural and inhumane Vices* being *patronised and protected by those Heathen Lawgivers*; but the *Laws of GOD* are all *pure and perfect, founded in Reason and Justice, and contrived for the best Interest of a People*: And it may be observed, that in those *Christian Countries* which are *illuminated with the Divine Oracles*, their *Laws and civil Government* are *much better adapted to the Benefit and Liberties of Mankind, and of Societies*, than in *Pagan and Popish Countries*, where this *Light* is either not *vouchſafed*, or where it is *suppreſſed*.

Subjects are hence taught their *Duty* in every *Relation and Capacity*: They are required to be *obedient to Rulers*, to *render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsars*, as well as *unto GOD the Things that are GOD's*: They are taught to cultivate *Truth and Justice, and Honesty, Temperance and Frugality, Peace and Love* towards one another by the *strongest Enforcements*; and to avoid the *contrary Vices of*

* *Vid. Rollins Ancient Hist. Vol. 2*

Lying, Extortion, Theft, Malice, Revenge, and every other Disorder, under the severest Penalties, such as no Authority on Earth can inflict, even the eternal Wrath and Vengeance of the Almighty, which leave an Awe upon the Conscience, effectual often to restrain from outward Irregularities, even whilst the depraved Temper of the Heart remains unchanged. And this is a considerable Advantage of a People's having the Oracles of GOD among them, committed to those whom GOD has appointed to be the faithful Dispensers of them, (who by constant Preaching, and inculcating the Doctrines and Precepts contained in them, contribute to the keeping up a Sense of Religion, and Reverence of the suprem Being in their Consciences) that a People are by those Means ordinarily civilized and preserved in good Order, by a common Blessing attending them, if they be not sanctified by special Divine Grace. Whereas if we look into the Heathen World, who are destitute of the Light of these Heavenly Oracles, what shall we see, but an uncultivated Wilderness, Barbarism and Confusion.

2. It will more especially appear with respect to a People's spiritual and eternal Interest. I join both together, because whatever is for the Benefit of our immortal Souls, must, for that Reason, be serviceable to our everlasting Interest and Happiness. If we were considered only as Citizens of this World; if our whole Duration terminated in Death and the Grave, we had not so greatly needed a Divine Revelation, nor would the Possession of the Divine Oracles have been celebrated, as so great a Prerogative of one People above another, nor the want of them so deplorable: But we are Creatures made for an eternal State of Existence, and that either in Happiness or Misery, and 'tis chiefly with this View, that we consider the Scripture Revelation committed to us, as so great and invaluable a Privilege, the ultimate Scope whereof is to point out eternal Life to us as the End, CHRIST as the Way, and by it's holy Rules and Precepts to conduct us to the Possession of it. 'Tis the Consideration of this, that should teach us to set a Value upon the sacred Oraeles, above Thousands of Gold and Silver. They are a Treasure that the Wealth of Ten Thousand Worlds cannot equal; yea, if laid in the Balance with them would be found lighter than Vanity.

Now the Advantage of the holy Scriptures with respect to our spiritual Interest may be easily gathered from what we have said of the deficiency of the Light of Nature: The Scripture Revelation supplies those Defects, and relieves us against those Doubts and Perplexities

Perplexities that a Soul conscious of Guilt is apt to be haunted with : It affords seasonable Direction to the great Ease of our Minds, where the Light of natural Reason leaves us wholly at a loss. Reason and Conscience tell us that we have fail'd of our Obedience to our Maker, and incurred his Wrath ; but leaves us in the dark about the Method of Reconciliation, how we may obtain Pardon and Peace ; the Divine Oracles give us full Satisfaction in this Matter by the Doctrine of Redemption and Remission of Sins in the Blood of CHRIST. Reason tells us that the GOD that made us is to be worshipped by us ; but, how shall we worship him so as to be accepted, Here it leaves us in Doubt. The divine Oracles alone give us a satisfactory Resolution of this Doubt, by shewing us a Way of Access to the FATHER, by the Mediation of his Son JESUS CHRIST. We find in our selves an insatiable Thirst after Happiness, our natural Reason tells us that all this World cannot yield us anHappiness, either suitable to the Nature, or satisfactory to the boundless Desires of our immortal Souls, that it can be of no further Service than till Death ; but what will become of us afterwards ? Here it leaves us to a dismal plunge, or at least to uncertain Conjectures ; but this Doubt is clearly resolv'd by the Oracles of JESUS CHRIST, which have scattered the dark shades of Death, and open'd to us a bright Prospect of Life and Immortality. Eternal Life is therein propounded and promised, and the Terms on which it is dispense'd, and the necessary Qualifications for the Possession of it stated, with so much Divine Wisdom and Grace, and so correspondent to the Reason and Consciences, the Desires and Hopes, of Mankind, as to give intire Satisfaction to every serious inquisitive Mind.

In a Word, the Doctrines, Histories, Precepts and Promises of Scripture, are exquisitely adapted to all our Spiritual Exigences, to relieve us against our Fears, to clear our Doubts, to strengthen our Hope, to support us under the Crosses of Life, to Comfort us under every kind of Affliction (there being no Comforts to be compared to the *Comfort of the Scripture*^h) to teach us Patience in Adversity, and to settle our Minds, in a true Contentment and Tranquility, to satisfy our rational Thirst after Knowledge of the best Things, and at the same Time to check a wanton Curiosity to furnish out the most delightful Entertainment to our Meditations, to assist us in subduing our Corruptions, in repelling Temptations and surmounting all Oppo-

sition in our Way to Heaven, to guide and assist our Devotion, and help us to keep up our Communion with Heaven in all Conditions of Life, to lead us on in a Course of Obedience to the End and Perfection of our Beings, and to build us up in Knowledge, Faith, Holiness and Comfort, and make us meet for the eternal Inheritance of the Kingdom of GOD. *The Word of the LORD is tryed*; and has been found by the wisest and best of Men, and recommended by them, as excellently serviceable to those Divine Purposes: No Religion, no Institution of a meer humane Original, will bear a Comparison with the holy Scriptures for the Satisfaction and Rest it gives to the Soul of Man, exercis'd with a serious Concern about its everlasting State, *Thus saith the LORD, stand in the Ways and see, ask for the old Paths, where is the good Way? And walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your Souls*ⁱ. Are not the divine Oracles then, committed to a People for these important Ends, a Priviledge of Inestmable Value?

Thirdly, The Advantages of the Divine Oracles to a People will further appear from divers *concomitant Privileges*: For where the Oracles of GOD are committed, i. e. given forth to and received by a People, by a professed Belief and Submission to them, as His Oracles, there He sets up his special Kingdom; there He resides and reigns in a peculiar Manner by his Word, Spirit, and special Providence. The visible Church is built on this Foundation, even the Oracles of the Prophets, and Apostles; so that all the Privileges of the visible Kingdom of GOD in the World, go along with this sacred Trust. I shall briefly instance in these Three, A standing Ministry, The Dispensation of the Spirit, and the special Care and Protection of Divine Providence.

i. *A standing Ministry*, Ordinances and Sacraments; the visible Symbols of GOD's special Presence with a People, and the sanctifyed Means of their Intercourse and Communion with Him, whereby they are visibly distinguish'd from the rest of the World. This Privilege of a standing Ministry is necessarily implied in or connected with the Oracles of GOD, as committed to a People, insomuch that they can't be said to be fully committed to them, where this Order of Men is wanting, whom GOD hath appointed as the Trustees of his Holy Oracles: And 'tis ordinarily by their Ministry, that the Doctrines of Scripture Revelation are made effectual to promote

ⁱ Jer. 6, 16.

the true Interests of a People in the foremention'd Respects ; and an able and faithful Ministry, has always been esteem'd as one of the greatest Blessings a People can enjoy, however ill it has been treated by the ungodly and profane, or however it has been accounted a Burden or Charge by atheistical Worldlings, who say in their Hearts, *to the Almighty, Depart from us, for we desire not the Knowledge of his Ways.* Yet since it is a divine Institution for the greatest Good to the Souls of Men, all that are Wise and serious, and know how to set a Value on the Divine Oracles, will ever account it a Mercy which they can't be sufficiently thankful for. 'Tis represented (in the Prophet ^k) as an invaluable Favour of GOD to a People, tho' their outward Circumstances be mean, and low, *tbo' the LORD give them the Bread of Adversity, and the Water of Affliction ; yet, that their Teachers shall not be removed into Corners, but their Eyes shall see their Teachers, and their Ears shall bear a Word behind them, &c.*

2. The Dispensation of the Spirit is another eminent and peculiar Privilege, which is ordinarily annex'd and confin'd to the Oracles of GOD dispens'd among a People. This is the ordinary Method GOD has settled for the Conveyance of this Gift from Heaven unto Men. Hence we so often read of the Spirit and the Word coupled together, of the Gospel preached with the Holy-Ghost sent down from Heaven ^l. *This (faith GOD) is my Covenant with them (the Gospel Church especially) or my Promise, according to which I hold my self engag'd to proceed with them, my Spirit, which is upon thee, and my Words which I have put in thy Mouth, shall not depart out of thy Mouth nor out of the Mouth of thy Seed, &c. from henceforth and for ever ^m.* *Behold (faith the Wisdom of GOD ⁿ) I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my Words unto you.* The Spirit of Wisdom is poured out when the Words of Wisdom are plentifully and powerfully opened and dispensed to a People, with suitable Impressions on their Minds. The Gospel is in a peculiar Manner *the Administration of the Spirit* ^o. And 'tis by the Spirit that the Word is made effectual to illuminate, quicken and convert the Souls of Men, and build them up in Knowledge and Holiness : And wherever these sacred Oracles are deposited, there are some (in greater or less Numbers) who are the happy Partakers of the divine Influences of the Spirit ; and all are more or less subject to them. So that GOD may

^k *Isai. 30. 20.* ^l *1 Pet. 1. 12.* ^m *Isai. 59. 21.* ⁿ *Prov. 1. 23.* ^o *2 Cor. 3. 8.*
be

be said to dwell by his Spirit where his Oracles are, as of old He dwelt in the Oracle of the Temple by the external Symbols of his Majesty.

3. The special Protection and Care of divine Providence is another Privilege afforded a People who have the Divine Oracles among them ; especially when they consult them, and govern themselves by them, and are faithful to their Truth ; for they are the Glory of a People, and upon this *Glory* GOD has promised to *create a Defence*, as truely and really (tho' in a less sensible Manner) as the Pillar of Cloud and Fire (which accompanied the Ark in which were the Tables of the Law) was to the *Israelites* in the Wilderness ^p. But without further Enlargement, I presume it is already evident, beyond all Exception, that a People who are intrusted with the Divine Oracles are distinguishingly favour'd of GOD, and have much every Way the Advantage of those who are left in the Darkness of Gentilism ; and that this is their Prerogative, which either includes in it, or brings along with it, all other desireable Blessings.]

I come now to the APPLICATION of the whole.

First. We learn hence what great Obligations we are under to adore the rich distinguishing Mercy of GOD to us, in committing his Holy Oracles to us, in giving us a full and clear Revelation of his Mind and Will in the sacred Scriptures, [which are so necessary (as we have heard) to supply the Defects of natural Light, to give us right Conceptions of the blessed GOD, His Attributes and Perfections, to open to us the Method of Redemption and Reconciliation to his offended Majesty, to guide us to the right Manner of worshipping Him by the Mediation of his Son JESUS CHRIST, to give us a clear and certain View of Things to come, which are of the highest Concernment to us, to know a future State of Recompences, the Resurrection of the Dead, and Life everlasting, to direct us in a Life of Faith and Obedience in order to eternal Happiness, to establish solid Grounds of Comfort and Hope in all Conditions in Life and Death : Concerning all which Matters of so great Importance, we had been left to woful Uncertainties, had we no other Guide than the Light of Nature : But having the infallible Oracles of GOD in the Holy Scriptures, we have sure Ground and Warrant to go upon in all our Faith, Hope and Ex-

pectation from GOD, and in all that Service, Obedience and Worship which we render to Him.] How great are our Obligations to the discriminating Grace of GOD for such an invaluable Privilege ? I say, *discriminating Grace*, for we are hereby dignified and distinguished from Multitudes of our Fellow-Creatures, many Nations of the Earth yet abiding Aliens from the Common-wealth of *Israel*, without GOD, without *CHRIST*, without Hope, sitting in the Region and Shadow of Death for want of this Revelation from Heaven, which we walk in the Light of : How should we adore the awful Sovereignty of GOD in hiding this Light from other People and Nations, great and populous, and in vouchsafing it to us, when *they* need it as much as we, and perhaps would make a better Improvement of it ? *Even so Father for so it seemeth Good in thy sight.* He hath shewed us his *Words*, his *Statutes and Judgments*, *He hath not dealt so with every Nation : Praise ye the LORD.*

We in this Country have abundant Reason to be thankful to GOD, who put it into the Hearts of our Fathers (who first planted this Land with a Christian People, and, were conducted hither by a Series of wonderful Providences) to set up a pure Scriptural Religion, free from the superstitious Usage, and corrupt Mixtures of humane Inventions, that had crept into the Church, and fullied its Purity and defac'd its Beauty in the latter Ages ; and to measure all Things in Faith, Worship, and Discipline, according to the Pattern in the Mount, the *sacred Oracles* : To these they professedly held as their only Rule, exclusive of all humane Constitutions and Canons ; and with a noble Zeal and Courage, Resolution and Fidelity appear'd to assert the sole Authority and Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, as a compleat Directory in all Matters of Religion : On this Bottom they erected Churches to our Lord JESUS ; and indeed other Foundation can no Man lay. And we their Children and Posterity should be guilty of great Unthankfulness to GOD, and Contempt of the Wisdom, Fidelity and Zeal of our pious Progenitors, if we should swerve in the least from this Foundation. We are not put upon contending for the Rule of Faith and Worship *once delivered to the Saints*, in the Manner as they did, against a tyrannizing Prelacy, that *then* prevailed. Nevertheless they had their Tryals also from another Quarter, as we may expect ours. Let us bless GOD for our Liberty and stand fast in it, admitting nothing into Religion, or his Worship, but what has the Stamp of His Authority upon it ; and be encourag'd after the Example of our Fathers, (whatever

Temptations

Temptations we may meet with) to adhere stedfastly to the Oracles of GOD, as our only and sufficient Rule for all the Purposes of Religion. Only let us not rest in external Privileges; but let us Evidence our Esteem of a Thankfulness for the Scriptures by our careful Study of them, and by conscientious Endeavours of conformity to them in Heart and Life, as the only compleat Rule to direct us in living to GOD, practically *taking heed thereunto, as to a Light shining in a dark Place, until the Day dawn, and the Day-star arise in our Hearts.* Thus let us glorify the Word of GOD.

Secondly, Learn hence how detrimental and injurious to a People's true Interest are those Opinions and Practises, that tend to weaken and destroy the Credit of the Holy Scriptures, or to expose them to Contempt; and what Enemies they are to the Church of GOD, as well as to their own Souls, who espouse and maintain those Principles and Practices: Such are Deists, Anti-scripturists, Papists, Enthusiasts.

The *Deist* under Pretence of the Oracles of Reason, decrys the Oracles of the living GOD. [But if we allow the Deist his Reason in the height of Perfection, far above all that has been ever yet discover'd in it's pretended Oracles, tho' he had the Understanding of an Angel, yet having once offended his Maker, and incur'd his righteous Displeasure, it is impossible for him to have a well grounded Hope of Pardon, and eternal Life, without a Revelation from GOD: Or, let him say, Whether it be not highly becoming a good and gracious GOD, supposing he hath designs of Mercy and Forgiveness to Sinners, to give them a Revelation of it, and of the Terms on which they may expect it, to engage their Trust, Dependance, Love, Thankfulness and Obedience to Himself: Or, whether that Revelation, we believe, GOD has given us in the Holy Scriptures, of Pardon of Sin and eternal Life, and of the Way and Manner of the Dispensation of these great Blessings, contains any Thing unworthy of the Divine Perfections, which are evident to natural Reason: Or, whether every Thing contain'd in it does not rather tend to illustrate the Glory of them. But, *Lo! They have rejected the Word of the LORD, and what Wisdom is in them* ^{q.}]

The *Papist* suppresses the infallible Oracles of GOD to make Room for the Oracles of the *Man of Sin*, Traditions, Councils, Canons, and the Decisions of the pretended infallible Chair. [Which

Pretence of Infallibility (if once granted) entirely nulls the Authority of the Divine Oracles; for if the Pope, and his Clergy have this Power of imposing what Sense and Interpretation they please on the Holy Scriptures, and of obliging all to pay a blind Submission to their Magisterial Dictates, the Scriptures are no more the Oracles of GOD; or, however they may have the Name, they cease to bind the Conscience in Virtue of a Divine Authority, for they bind only in Respect of their Sense and Meaning. He that assumes a Power of Interpreting the King's Laws authoritatively, and of making them speak just what he pleases, 'tis plain he takes the Authority out of the King's Hands into his own. Not to add, that the use of the Scriptures is suppress'd by the Papal Authority (so far as it reaches) in the vulgar Tongue, so that they are become a sealed Book to all but the Learned.] But I hope, this Country has but little Concern with these two sorts of Men that impugn the Authority and Reputation of the sacred Oracles.

A Third Sort there is, of which it is to be feared there are great Numbers among us, who tho' they do not so openly assault, yet, under Pretence of a Veneration for the Holy Scriptures, do really and effectually undermine their Credit and Usefulness, whether intentionally or not; and these are *Enthusiasts*, who substitute the Oracles of their own Brain, the Dreams and Visions of a distemper'd Imagination, instead of the Divine Oracles; or at least, set them up in Competition or Rivalship with them, as being of equal Authority: Who Mistake strong and lively Impressions on their Fancies for the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which the Prophets and Apostles, the holy Penmen of Scripture, were Subjects of; and being perswaded that they are Subjects of the immediate Dictates of the Spirit, how wild, confus'd and erroneous soever their Notions are, they are Proof against Conviction by Scripture or Reason; for the Teachings and Dictates of the Spirit are above all: As for sober Reason, *that* is a dull carnal Thing with them; and the Scriptures shall have no other Sense than what they are taught by the Spirit to put upon them, which is infallible, but indeed no other Sense but what suits the strong Conceits of their over-heated Imaginations, and besure they can have no Meaning against them for their Conviction in the Mouth of an Opposer, who is despis'd as not having the Spirit, and consequently as not capable of understanding the Sense of Scripture. This, I confess is a Method whereby a Man may elude the Force of the plainest Demonstration. [Such Persons are beyond all Methods of Conviction pro-

per to Mankind, except that of Sense, to which many have been left in a very awful Manner, thro' the righteous Judgment of GOD. But there needs nothing more with sober and discreet Minds for the Confutation of the enthusiastick Spirit, than the painting it out in its own unsightly Colours. 'Tis true, there are Degrees of this Distemper of Mind, nor does it reign in all the Wildness and Extravagancies of it equally in all, nor is it to be question'd but that many pious well-meaning Persons may be the Subjects of some Tincture of it: Nevertheless, it is in the least Degree to be carefully watch'd against, as being of dangerous Consequence, and exceeding Detrimental to Religion and the Church of GOD, as it tends to bring Contempt on the sacred Oracles, to impair and weaken their Authority and Credit, which we have shewed to be the most valuable Blessing a People are posses'd of; and as it tends to bring Disorder into the Church and State. And the Confusions and Convulsions in our Churches these late Years, the Separations and Violations of the Bonds of sacred Covenants, are too evidently owing to the Prevalancy of such a Spirit among us! And certainly both Ministers and People are highly concern'd to manifest a just Detestation of, and Zeal against all Appearances of this Spirit of Enthusiasm, in Proportion to the Value we ought to have of the sacred Oracles as our choicest Treasure.

'Tis evident the great Enemy of Mankind, from the Spite he bears to the Holy Scriptures, is behind the Curtain, playing his Games by all these his wretched Instruments, Infidels, Papists, and Enthusiasts. The Infidel or Deist is but a few Removes from the Atheist: The Atheist will not see a GOD in his Works of Creation; and the Deist will not behold a GOD in the Scripture Revelation, wherein the Glories of the divine Nature, the Wisdom and Holiness, the Justice and Truth, the Grace and Love, the Authority and Majesty of a GOD shine out in the Face of his substantial Image JESUS CHRIST, in his Person, Doctrine, Example, and whole Institution, as clearly and conspicuously to every serious unprejudiced Mind, as any of the Perfections of the invisible Deity in the Works of Creation; and therefore the Apostle resolves Infidelity into the Agency of Satan, in blinding Men's Minds against so clear a Light as shines in the Face of JESUS CHRIST; *For if our Gospel be hid, saith he, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them that believe not, lest the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should shine into them.*

2 Cor. 4. 3, 4.

And

And that Popery, as distinct from our common Christianity, has its Rise from the same Source, we learn from the Apostle's Description of the coming of the Man of Sin, *after the working of Satan*, with all Power and Signs and lying Wonders, and with all Deceivableness of Unrighteousness in them that perish.

And if Satan can accomplish the same Design against the Scriptures by the Errors of Enthusiasm, he can easily *transform himself into an Angel of Light* for that Purpose, and obtrude his Delusions upon unstable and unwary Souls, instead of the immediate Dictates of the Divine Spirit. And tho' Infidelity and Enthusiasm be opposite Terms, (the former rejects all revealed Religion, the latter is a false Pretence to new Revelations,) yet they befriend and strengthen each other more perhaps than is tho't. 'Tis for want of a settled Belief of the Holy Scriptures, that Men lie open to enthusiastick Impressions, and too readily admit them: And Enthusiasm or a false Pretence to Inspiration is the ready Way to bring all revealed Religion into Contempt, and make Men turn Atheists and Infidels; and the Enthusiast himself is in the utmost Danger of Infidelity, when the Vanity of his Pretences are discover'd, being tempted thereby to think all Revelation, true and pretended, alike; tho' such as have their spiritual Senses exercised will easily discern the Difference between the Dreams of Men, and the Oracles of GOD. *He that hath a Dream (saith GOD by the Prophet) let him tell a Dream, tell it as a Dream (so sonne) and he that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully: What is the Chaff to the Wheat, saith the Lord?*

I might properly, under this Head, add a Word of Caution and Exhortation to all. Of Caution against the Abuse of the Holy Scriptures. Their being consider'd as the Oracles of GOD, bespeaks the highest Reverence of them! Let us beware of abusing them by phantastical Explications of them, by wresting them to the Support of any Errors in Opinions or Practice, or by irreverent Applications of them in common Discourse. Remember the Oracle was the holiest Part of GOD's Temple, and the Scriptures are among the holiest Things of GOD, that we converse with in this World, and ought ever to be treated with a peculiar Veneration. And let us be exhorted to endeavour by all Means to settle our Minds in a full and firm Perswasion of the divine Original and Authority of the sacred Writings, as containing the sure and infallible Oracles of GOD; and

s 2 Theſſ. 2. 9, 10. t Jer. 23. 28

as such let us repair to them, and consult them on all Occasions : Let us be serious and diligent in the Perusal of them : Let us make them our constant Companions and Counsellours : Let us be open to the Light and Conviction they impart to us : And in all Controversies and Disputes in Religion, let us with an humble Reverence of their Authority, submit our Consciences to their Determination, and practically attend to them as *a Lamp to our Feet, and Light to our Path.*

Thirdly, We hence see the great Importance of the *ministerial Trust.* If the Trust committed to the Civil Magistrate, who has the Charge of a People's temporal Interest, and is appointed the Guardian of their civil Rights and Charters by which they hold their Estates and Liberties, is so weighty and important, that it requires the most consummate Wisdom, Integrity and Zeal to manage it aright, How much more so is the Trust committed to the Ministers of Religion ? They are intrusted with the spiritual and eternal Interests of a People, with that which is their chief Privilege and Advantage, with the Charter of all their blessed Privileges and Hopes ; the Divine Oracles being in a special and solemn Manner put into their Hands, of which they are appointed the Stewards to guard and secure them, and faithfully to dispense them in the Discharge of the Duties of their ministerial Function. The Dispensation of the glorious Gospel of the blessed GOD is committed to their Trust, by which they are to guide and feed, to instruct and govern the Souls under their Charge : How solemn and weighty is this Trust ! Who is sufficient for these Things ! As this ought to be seriously pondered by us that are Ministers to excite our zealous and diligent Endeavours, in a Dependance on the Fountain of Light and Grace, that we may approve our Fidelity to Him that appointed us ; so it should teach us all to admire the Wisdom and Goodness of GOD in that he has not only given his Church the Scriptures, containing his sacred Oracles, but also appointed an Order of Men in it, furnish'd with suitable Gifts and Qualifications, whose Business it should be by assiduous Study and Preaching to open the Scriptures, and interpret the Mind and Will of GOD therein unto the People, and apply the Word to them by Conviction, Reasonings, by serious urgent Calls and Exhortations, Admonitions and Counsels, for promoting the Conversion of Souls, and confirming the Faith of Christians, and building them up in Holiness and Comfort.

To them the Holy Bible is committed for the Use and Instruction of the People ; therefore besides the written Word, the Ministry is a wise and useful Institution, both for Explaining the difficult Passages, and inculcating the plain Truths of the Bible, without which People would be apt to cast it aside as a sealed Book, or let it ly by as a neglected Book. When *Philip* found the Eunuch reading the Scripture, he puts this Question to him, *Understandest thou, what thou readest?* He replies, *How can I, except some Man should guide me?*^u So there are many Passages in Scripture of great Use, which common People can't understand, except they have some to guide and instruct them ; and tho' all Things in the Holy Oracles necessary to Salvation be intelligible and plain, yet the generality of People, thro' Sloth and Negligence, or the Aversion of their Minds to spiritual Things, would abide Strangers to many great and important Truths contained in them, if they were not frequently bro't to their Mind, and urg'd upon them with Light and Force by the Preachers of the Word : Which shews the Necessity and Usefulness of the Ministry in the Church ; and the Wisdom and Grace of God in the Appointment of this Order of Men, to whom he has committed the Dispensation of his Oracles.]

Hence,
Fourthly, Let all who have this sacred Trust committed to them, be exhorted to Faithfulness in the discharge of it. Suffer me now, *Reverend Fathers, and Brethren*, to be a little more particular under this Head, in shewing the Duties incumbent on us as Ministers of Religion, and our Obligations to the faithful Discharge of it.

In shewing what it is this Trust obliges us to, let me apply that Declaration of the Apostle in the Form of an Exhortation. *1 Thes. 2. 4.* *As we are allowed of GOD to be put in Trust with the Gospel; so we speak, (so let us speak) not as pleasing Men, but God which trieth our Hearts; or as another Apostle directs, Let us speak as the Oracles of GOD.*^w

And, first of all, It concerns us to have a satisfying Perswasion, that *we are allowed of GOD to be put in Trust with His Oracles*; that we are authoriz'd and commissioned by him. Now there is a twofold Approbation of GOD with respect to the Ministers of the Gospel, the *First, more General*, declared in his revealed Will, the Scriptures of

^u *Act. 8. 30, 31. w 1 Pet. 4. 11.*

the New-Testament, wherein the Qualifications requisite to the sacred Office are described, that those who are vested in it should be Men of approved Virtue and Piety, of superior Knowledge and Gifts, sound in Faith, and blameless in Life, and regularly separated to their Office; and when Ministers appear to be thus qualified according to the Prescriptions of GOD's revealed Will, they are to be esteem'd, *in Foro Ecclesiae*, as approv'd of GOD to be put in Trust with the Gospel, or to have the Oracles committed to them. *The second, more special Approbation*, is that which is founded on the perfect and exact Knowledge, which GOD alone hath of the Heart, its Principles and Intentions: If these be right in his Sight, then they are the Subjects of his special Approbation.

In respect of GOD's general Approbation of Ministers, which his revealed Will declares, which is the alone Rule whereby we are able to form a Judgment of Men's Qualification for the sacred Ministry, I hope I may be permitted to say, without Vanity or Flattery, of the *Body of the Ministers* of this Land, without any invidious Comparisons with the Ministry of other Churches, that they are such as are approved of GOD to be put in Trust with the Gospel; Men of conspicuous Learning, and Piety, *faithful Men, and able* and apt to teach others (the Scripture Characters of those to whose Trust, by divine Warrant, the sacred Oracles are to be committed) and who have all the Scripture requisites to their orderly Separation, to the ministerial Office, and Work. And GOD grant, this Testimony may be ever given the Ministers of these Churches, with equal Truth and Justice.

What an Injury then is it to their Reputation and Usefulness, to be represented (as to the greater Part) as Men unconverted, and as having no spiritual Acquaintance with CHRIST, and no Experimental Sense of the Religion they Preach; and what a gross Violation is this of the Law of Charity, which teaches and obliges us to *believe all Things, and to hope all Things, and to think or suspect no evil where there is not apparent Evidence*^x? By which Rule of Charity, we are obliged to think well of all, both Ministers and Christians, yea, and esteem others better than ourselves^y, whose Conversation agrees with their Profession, who are Sound in Principle, and regular in their Deportment (which is the only Evidence that falls under humane Cognizance) and to leave the Secrets of the Heart to GOD

^x 1 Cor. 13. 5, 7: ^y Phil. 2. 3.

only:

only : And what a Wound is given to Religion by such uncharitable Aspersions on the Ministry, we can't but see and lament in the sad Effects of this censorious Spirit, that has prevail'd of late Years in the Land, in the preposterous Zeal that People have been transported with, which has occasion'd so many Disorders, and in the uncharitable Separations and Divisions in many of our Churches. And when People are told, that the Cause why there is so little of the Life of Religion in our Congregations is, not because the Hearers have dead Hearts, but because they have *dead Men to preach to them*; what a secret Pleasure, may we suppose, the carnal Hearts of Men to take in finding the blame thus transferred on their Ministers, and themselfes so far excused for their long unprofitableness under the Preaching of the sound Doctrine of CHRIST ? For which they should rather condemn themselves, and mourn bitterly. And what a strong tendency has this to alienate them from their Ministers, against whom they have imbib'd such Prejudices ? There cannot be a greater Difservice to Religion than bringing the Ministry into Disrepute with People: Therefore we find the great Apostle spending a considerable Part of several of his Epistles in vindicating his ministerial Character and Conduct, as knowing that the great Enemy of Souls could do nothing more effectually to obstruct the Success of the Gospel, than by discrediting the Preachers of it: But however they may be reproach'd by open Enemies, or pretended Friends, if they are such as may be deem'd, according to Scripture Rules, approv'd of GOD to be put in Trust with his Oracles, it is at Men's Peril if they refuse to attend their Instructions; that which many now plead as the Cause of their Separations will but aggravate their Guilt in the Day of Accounts.

But, thy Fathers and Brethren, Let it not suffice us, that we may be able to justify ourselves against the rash Censures of weak, fallible Men, but let us consider that we have to do with a GOD who not only knows, but tries the Heart; which, as it affords solid Comfort against Men's Reproaches and Censures, whilst our Consciences can witness to our Integrity, so it obliges us to an exact Care and Watchfulness, that we may approve the Uprightness of our Hearts to Him, and to do all Things as in his Sight, with Sincerity and Faithfulness; otherwise a Reputation with Men will avail us but little, *for he that judgeth us is the Lord*; and it should be our chief Solitude and Aim to commend ourselves to his special Approbation. Now then let me go on to say in the next Place,

That

That being allowed of GOD to be put in Trust with the Dispensation of his Oracles, let us approve our Fidelity to Him in the Discharge of this Trust, let us faithfully adhere to the sacred Oracles, and govern ourselves by their Instructions in these three Branches of our Office and Employment. 1. In our Preaching and Doctrine. 2. In administering the Discipline and Government of the Church. 3. In committing the ministerial Trust to others; for all which we are abundantly furnished with Instructions from the Holy Scriptures.

1. *In our Preaching and Doctrine.* Let us speak as the Oracles of GOD speak, and that both as to Matter and Manner.

First, As to the Matter of our Doctrine: Let it be the pure Word of GOD. This is our Charge, *Preach the Word*, the Word fully, the Word only, then we shall speak as pleasing GOD, when we declare his whole Counsel, and nothing but his Counsel. We are not left to our own Opinions, or Fancies, or Experiences, to judge what is most pleasing to GOD, or most conducive to the Good of Souls; but he has fully and exactly prescribed to us in his Word, what it is his Pleasure we should speak without diminishing from it, or adding to it. One great End of Preaching is to convince and convert Souls: Now it is only by the pure Word of GOD that the divine Spirit may be expected to operate for this Purpose. *If they had stood in my Counsel (faith GOD by the Prophet) and had caused my People to bear my Words, then they should have turned them from their evil Way.* But if Men, not content with the awful Declarations of the Word of GOD, for awakening Sinners unto Repentance and Conversion, set themselves to devise something more frightful to astonish the Minds, and alarm the Passions of their Hearers, they go off from their Warrant, and can't rationally suppose, that the Effect of such a Method (whatever it be) on Men's Minds, proceeds from the Concurrence of the Spirit of GOD. Another End of the Ministry is to administer Comfort to wounded Consciences, and disconsolate Souls: Here we must beware of dawbing with untempered Mortar. We must fetch all our Arguments of Comfort from the sacred Oracles; they must be the Comforts of the Scriptures, such Comforts as are founded on, and warranted by the Scripture. We must study these, and stick close to these, whenever we speak in the Name of the LORD.

2 Tim. 4. 2. Jer. 23. 22.

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Nor

Nor are the less important Matters of the Word to be the chief Subject of our Ministry ; for tho' every Tittle of GOD's Word hath its Weight, yet there are the greater Matters of the Gospel, as well as of the Law, which ought to be chiefly insisted on, if we would approve ourselves faithful Dispensers of the Divine Oracles. Let me particularly Instance in Three weighty Subjects, which, as they are the principal Matter of the Oracles of GOD, so they should be of our Preaching, *viz.* CHRIST JESUS, The Doctrine of Grace, and, Practical Religion and Holiness.

[i. CHRIST JESUS, who is the great Subject of the Oracles of GOD. The Old Testament Predictions concerning CHRIST are especially intended, (as some think) by the *Oracles of GOD* in our Text. He was spoken of *by the Mouth of the holy Prophets, which have been since the World began*^b. And it is the special Work and Office of Gospel Ministers to *preach CHRIST JESUS the LORD*^c. But by the preaching of CHRIST, I don't mean, that we should confine our Preaching to the Person and Offices of CHRIST. The Phrase of *Preaching CHRIST*, which so often occurs in the New-Testament, is of much larger Extent in its Signification, it intends preaching the whole Christian Revelation : As the preaching of *Moses* in the Jewish Synagogues (for *Moses* is said to have *them that preach Him, being read in the Synagogues every Sabbath Day*^d) means the preaching of the Law of *Moses*, or the Doctrine contained in the Five Books of *Moses* : So the *preaching of CHRIST* signifies nothing less than preaching the Gospel of CHRIST, the whole Revelation of CHRIST : Nay further, we may be said to preach CHRIST, when we preach the moral Duties enjoined in the Gospel of CHRIST, provided we preach them upon Gospel Grounds, on which they are enjoin'd. *Felix* desired *Paul* to preach to him the Faith of CHRIST ; and, doubtless, he did not disappoint his Expectation, when he preach'd before him ; but what did he preach ? The sacred Historian tells us no more, but that *He reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, (moral Duties) and Judgment to come*^e. Therefore it becomes an Evangelical Preacher to inculcate and enforce moral Duties, by the Motives of Gospel Revelation ; but the preaching moral Duties only, or chiefly, will convey but little Life or Savour to the Hearers. It may deserve our Notice and Consideration, that 'tis only by the preaching of supernatural Truths, or the Doctrine and

^b Luk. 1. 70. ^c 2 Cor. 4. 5. ^d Acts 15. 21. ^e Acts 24. 25.

Revelation of JESUS CHRIST, that the supernatural Grace of the Spirit is conveyed for renewing the Souls of Men unto the Likeness of GOD, and fitting them for Heaven. We are *washed* and *sanctified* — *in the Name of the Lord JESUS* (by the Gospel preach'd in his Name) and by the Spirit of our GOD. There are many eternal Truths in the Writings of *Seneca*, *Cicero*, *Plutarch*, and other grave Heathen Moralists ; and it had been happy for the World had they been more generally embrac'd and transcrib'd in Men's Practices ; but they had little or no Efficacy on a corrupt World, for the Amendment of it. If it be ask'd, why GOD did not give forth his Spirit to make those Truths and Precepts of Morality effectual for the Reformation of Mankind ? I take the main Reason to be, that GOD reserv'd this Honour for the Revelation and Doctrine of his Son, the Gospel of our Lord JESUS, which is of far greater Authority than any other meer humane Institution, and is much better adapted to instruct and reform Mankind ; and as it contains the most excellent System of Precepts, far beyond any moral Philosophy that ever appeared in the World before, so the Truths and Doctrines of this Revelation are with admirable Wisdom suited to work upon the Souls and Consciences of Men, and such as it appears worthy of GOD to own, by the Dispensation of his Spirit from Heaven. The Love of GOD the FATHER, the Grace of the REDEEMER, the Blood and Intercession of JESUS CHRIST, the Doctrine of Repentance for the Remission of Sins in his Name, of the Righteousness of Faith, of the Resurrection and last Judgment, of a future State of Rewards and Punishments ; these are Doctrines peculiar to the Oracles and Revelations of JESUS CHRIST, these are Doctrines that have a close Correspondence with Men's Consciences, and come with a peculiar Light & Force upon them, with these the Holy Spirit concurs, and insinuates his Influences for the enlivening and renewing the Souls of Men. Let us then, my Fathers and Brethren, make these the chief Subject of our Ministry, the Life and Strength of our Preaching, for promoting vital Piety ; and all religious Practice lies in these. To preach these Doctrines, and the rest that depend on them, or are connected with them, is properly and eminently to preach CHRIST.

2. Another principal Subject is the *Doctrine of Grace*, which is indeed, no other than the Doctrine of CHRIST ; but I consider it here, as that Divine Attribute which gave Rise to the Oracles of the Scriptures, and the Dispensation of JESUS CHRIST, and which ap-

pears most Conspicuous in the whole Contexture of the Christian Scheme, the Glory whereof is design'd as the ultimate Scope of all. Now one great End of the Ministry which we have receiv'd of our Lord JESUS, is, *To testify the Gospel of the Grace of GOD*^g. We have great Reason to magnify and admire the rich and free Grace of GOD to sinful perishing Men, and on all Occasions to speak the Praises of it. We are to teach the People what the Grace of GOD hath already done for them, in providing a Redeemer allsufficient, in affording them the Gospel Ministrations, and in the common Influences of the Spirit going along with it, to excite and assist their Endeavours in order to their Recovery from Sin and Ruin. We are to teach, and inculcate the Necessity of supernatural special Grace in the Work of Conversion, Sanctification and Perseverance. We are to hold forth the relative Privileges of Grace, Election, Redemption, Remission of Sins, Justification, and eternal Salvation; all which we are to teach them to ascribe to the free and unmerited Favour of GOD, and to look for these invaluable Benefits from the Hands of free Grace, and not on the Score of any Merit of their own.

In the mean Time, We ought to use great Wisdom and Caution in Explaining and setting forth the Doctrines of Grace, that we may not be accessory to the horrible Abuse of it, to Licentiousness, which is so notorious, and so highly provoking to GOD in the Christian World. We are to teach Grace, so as not to exclude, but encourage Man's Endeavours in working out his own Salvation; so as not to exclude the Necessity of good Works, as if Grace must do all for us, and we nothing; but so as to urge the necessary Connection of Grace with true and real Holiness; which Connection will appear if we consider Grace, either as a Principle, or as a Privilege: As a Principle put into us by the Spirit of GOD, unless it sanctify us, and carry us out to all Gospel Holiness, Grace will do nothing for us in any other Way to bring us to Heaven: As a Privilege in our Pardon, Justification, &c. so it is inviolably connected with the Gospel Terms of Faith, Repentance and new Obedience, without which we can have no Title to those Privileges, and 'tis meer Presumption to look for any Share in them; so the *Grace of GOD that bringeth Salvation*, rightly explain'd, does in the strongest Manner inforce our Duty upon us, and *teach us to deny Ungodliness, and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and Godly in this present World*^h.

3. *Practical Religion and Holiness*, the great Design of the Oracles of GOD, is another weighty Subject that ought to be chiefly insisted on by the faithful Dispensers of these Oracles. This is the main Use and End of the inspired Scriptures, as they are *profitable for Instruction in Righteousness*¹. This the Apostle requires Gospel Ministers to affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God be careful to maintain good Works²; to inculcate all the Duties of the moral Law upon Gospel Principles; all the Doctrines of Grace lead to this, (as I have already observ'd) and this is the great End of the whole Dispensation of the Redeemer. CHRIST gave himself a Sacrifice and Ransom to redeem us from Sin, and purify unto himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works³. See the Drift of CHRIST's Love to Souls, *He loved the Church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it*⁴. And in preaching his Gospel, let our Love and Compassion to Souls have the same Scope: It should not satisfy this Love, to bring Men to a loose general Faith in CHRIST, as a Saviour, which leaves them careless of due Respects to his Laws; but our great aim and Study should be, to have CHRIST formed in them, the Image of CHRIST consisting in a Conformity of Temper and Behaviour to his Gospel and Spirit, or the new Man, in Righteousness and true Holiness, without which no Man shall see the LORD. This is the chief End of the Institution of the Ministry, and of all faithful Preaching, and the true Success of the Ministry lies in gaining this End.] Thus much for the Matter of Preaching: We must speak what the Oracles of GOD warrant.

Secondly, As to the Manner. We must speak as the Oracles of GOD, not only seriously and reverently, as all sacred Things ought to be treated, but also conformably to the Example of the Divine Oracles, and the Manner of Speaking used therein; that is to say, Plainly, Truly, Affectionately, Boldly, Fully.

1. Plainly. The peculiar Recommendation of the Divine Oracles is their Plainness and Perspicuity in all the important Matters of Faith and Salvation: So we should study Plainness in Preaching, that we may accommodate ourselves to the Understandings and Consciences of our Hearers. Now the Vail is taken off Moses his Face. We the Ministers of the New Testament (saith the Apostle) use great plainness of Speech⁵. This agrees well to the clear and spiritual Dispensation we are under. The Ornaments of Diction may suit and please the Fancy,

but 'tis the plain Truth, represented in its Nature, Majesty and Force, that reaches the Conscience : 'Tis plain and clear Reasoning that convinces the Judgment and goes to the Heart.

2. *Truely.* Telling Men the Truth impartially, whether it please or displease, as the Oracles of GOD do, giving them a faithful Representation of the Mind and Will of GOD. *He that hath my Word (faith GOD in the Prophet) let him speak my Word faithfully.* 'Twas a true Character given to our Saviour (tho' by his insidious Adverfaries, flattering and tempting him) and a very honourable one, *Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the Way of God in Truth, neither carest thou for any Man, for thou regardest not the Person of Men.* A Character highly becoming every Messenger from GOD.

3. *Affectionately.* The Holy Ghost, we find in Scripture, putting on humane Affections in speaking to Men, to accommodate himself to the Nature of Man's Soul ; so we should endeavour to get our own Hearts affected with the Truths we deliver, and to speak of them with Affection to others : Not that a Preacher should chiefly address the Affections of his Hearers ; but he ought to do it in a judicious Way, suiting Affections to the Nature of the Matter discours'd, that the Light imparted to the Understanding might proportionably influence the Affections ; thus the Oracles of GOD must come from our Lips as *lively Oracles.* 'Tis the Observation of the learned and pious Mr. Morton *. that, " This seems to be the great Difference (with many) between preaching *vivè Voce* (the ordinary converting Ordinance of GOD) and bare Reading in private, that no Writing can so well expres Affections, tho' the Matter, and perhaps the very Words are the same."

4. *Boldly, and with Authority :* As the Scriptures speak in GOD's Name, not as courting Men's Affections with plausible, insinuating Language, or using subtle Arts to gain their Assent to its Truths or Compliance with its Dictates, but in a Majestick Stile, declaring the Will of GOD to Men (*thus saith the LORD*) and (as it were) with an holy Air of Indifference, *whether they will bear, or whether they will forbear,* leaving their Consciences to answer it at their Pe-

ⁿ Jer. 23. 28. ^o Matt. 22. 16.

* See his *Advice to Candidates for the Ministry, &c.* Preserv'd in Dr. Calamy's Continuation of the Account of the ejected Ministers in the County of Cornwall. The whole (t'o calculated for different Times) is well worth the Perusal of all that intend the Ministry.

ril: So being well assur'd of the Truth and divine Authority of our Message, we should speak the Word boldly, without baulking any Truth out of a Desire of the Favour and Fear of the Displeasure of any Man.

5. *Fully.* As GOD has revealed to us his whole Counsel in the Scriptures, so we should endeavour faithfully to declare the whole Counsel of GOD, and keep back nothing that is profitable to People's Souls. In all these Respects we should aim and endeavour to speak as the Oracles of GOD: And in order hereto we should be careful to speak what has been prepar'd by previous Study and Meditation; without which we shall be in Danger of being rash with our Mouths, to utter Things inconsistent with, and unbecoming the Oracles of GOD. And it argues great Irreverence towards GOD, to offer to speak in his Name *as his Mouth* to his People, without having digested the Message, both as to Matter and proper Expressions, which we are to deliver in so solemn a Manner; and it also argues too great Contempt of our Hearers, to entertain them or rather to put them off with extemporary and unstudied Harangues.

Let me therefore recommend it to my younger Brethren especially, and Candidates for the Ministry, to take Care that their Sermons be well labour'd and studied, and committed to Writing, for the better avoiding such crude, incoherent and unscriptural Expressions, to say no worse, which are often the Effect of extemporary Effusions. The *Preacher* should seek to find out acceptable Words, that what is written may be *upright*, even *Words of Truth*^p. Study to shew thyself approved unto GOD (faith the Apostle) rightly dividing the Word of Truth^q, which can be but poorly done without deep Study and Penetration: Nor without this will you be able to speak as the Oracles of GOD in the foremention'd Respects, especially, not so plainly, so truly, nor so fully. Not *so plainly* to the Understanding of the Hearers. 'Tis scarce possible for the ablest Speaker to deliver a Discourse so correct, methodical and intelligible to the Audience *extempore*, as if he had studied for it before-hand. The End of Study is not to embellish our Sermons with fine Rhetorical Flourishes, or the most delicate Turns of Expressions; but, that we may, in the plainest Manner, set home divine Truths on the Hearts and Consciences of the Hearers, which will require a great deal of Fore-thought and Deliberation. Not *so truly*, but that some Errors, tho' undesigned,

^p Eccl. 12. 10. ^q 2 Tim. 2. 15.

or some unguarded Expressions will slip from you, which cannot be so well adjusted to strict Truth : The slips of the Tongue to a Man that uses his best Endeavours to prevent them, are indeed pardonable ; but not so to him, who in the Neglect of Study professes to depend on the Spirit for Utterance ; but he should be convinced, that where the natural Powers GOD has given Men, rightly used, are sufficient by the Assistance of common Grace, there the extraordinary supernatural Grace of the Spirit is not needed, nor is it promised, nor therefore can it warrantably be expected. And I may add, *not so fully*, for tho' a Man of tolerable Elocution, may be able to Discourse plausibly, without much Study, on some few popular Subjects ; yet his Thoughts running mostly in the same Channel, and on the same Subjects, he must be supposed to leave out of his Preaching many necessary and important Truths of the Word, or but superficially touch them ; and he will be far from declaring the whole Counsel of GOD, which requires laborious Study and close Application of Mind in searching the Holy Scriptures. Let us not think it an easy Matter to speak as the Oracles of GOD ; it is not Language that flows naturally from us, but must be acquir'd, by the Blessing of GOD, on our serious and painful Endeavours. But to proceed,

2. In the *Administration of the Discipline and Government of the Church*, let the sacred Oracles be our sole Rule and Guide. *The Man of GOD* is sufficiently furnished hence with all necessary Instructions for the Exercise of that Rule and Government that is committed to him in the House of GOD. So that here is no room for humane Constitutions for this Purpose, which are both unnecessary and unlawful : For if JESUS CHRIST be the sole Lord and King of his Church, as is confess'd by all, it follows, that it is by *his* Laws, and *his only*, that his Church must be govern'd. And the Authority committed to us for the Exercise of this Government, is not Magistratical, but Ministerial. We are to open and declare only the Laws of JESUS CHRIST, and in his Name to require Obedience to them ; and to take Care that the Orders of the great Lord of the House, be observ'd by all his Family. We are to teach all that He has commanded, and only what He has commanded in the sacred Oracles ; thence we have full Directions as to the Qualifications of those whom we are to admit as Members of his Family or Church ; and for instructing the several Members of it in the Duties of Church Relation ; and for correcting and reproving Errors and Miscarriages ; and for the Guidance of the several Flocks under our Charge, in the Administration of the Censures

of the Church : In all which we must keep close to the inspired Scriptures as a compleat Rule ; these point out to us the several Offenders that are to be dealt with, and the Manner of proceeding with them.

And here let me humbly offer it to the Consideration of my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, Whether the disorderly Separations that have so greatly prevail'd in the several Churches of the Land, have been duly animadverted on in the Way of *Ecclesiastical Discipline*, as the Oracles of GOD warrant and require ? Or, whether nothing remains further or more effectually to be done in that Way, in Testimony against, and in Remedy of, such lamentable Disorders ? For whatever Men's religious Pretences are, I am perswaded, that the Violations of solemn Vows to GOD in separating from a Church, without just and necessary Cause, are no light Sins ; for are not such Separations a plain Breach of that sacred Covenant to which every Member who is admitted into our Communion, at adult Age, solemnly professes his Consent, to walk in that Relation according to the Ordinances and Commandments of the Gospel of CHRIST ? And does not our *Platform*, agreeably to the Scriptures, declare, that *to separate from a Church, out of Schism, or want of Love, or a Spirit of Meekness, and Forbearance, is unlawful and sinful* † ? And should such Sins pass uncensur'd ?

If it be said, This will be to use violent Measures, and rather increase the Separation. I answer, that the Exercise of holy Discipline which CHRIST has committed to the Church and its Ministry, according to the Rules of the Gospel, is far distant from Methods of Violence. We are to proceed, in dealing with Offenders in a Way of Duty, and Obedience to CHRIST, and, as the Gospel requires, with much Tenderness and Long-suffering, Love and Compassion to their Souls ; faithfully representing to them their Sin and Danger as Transgressors of the Law of CHRIST, in order to their being reduc'd from their Wandrings ; exhibiting, as much as possible, the Compassions of our great High Priest towards *the ignorant and them that are out of the Way*. And this is not using Methods of Violence.

And, as for the increasing the Separation by this Means, I confess, I am of another Mind : This appears to me to be the most likely Method of putting a Stop to it, by keeping up the Reverence of Order in the Church of GOD ; by representing the Beauty and

† See *Platform*, Chap. xiii. Sect. 1. and 5.

Majesty of CHRIST's spiritual Government ; by letting Men know that the Church of CHRIST is not a confused Rout, or like a *City broken down, and without Walls*, leaving Men at their Liberty to go and come without Controul ; but that there is an holy Order and Rule, they must submit to, by which the Church appears most amiable in itself, and in the Eyes of all its Friends and Wellwishers, who *rejoyce in beholding its Order* ; and to all its Opposers, *terrible as an Army with Banners*. And we have great Reason to trust the Blessing of CHRIST on his own Institution, without fear of the Consequences, while we are found in the Way of our Duty. Whereas the letting fall the strictness of Discipline has a visible Tendency to bring Contempt on Churches, and on all instituted Religion, and to open a Door of Licentiousness to Church Members : But I shall add no more, but leave it to Consideration. Only let me say, whatever may be tho't of what I have now proposed, with Respect to our Separatists : It is certainly a Fault for any to Countenance and confirm them in their Separation, by holding Communion with them in any Gospel Ordinance : The Principle of Catholick Charity will not bear them out here ; for tho' I am to love all Men, yet I am not oblig'd to express this Love to all, by holding Gospel Fellowship with them, no, not to all Christians ; yea, I am oblig'd not to do it, *We command you* (saith the Apostle^{1.}) *in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST that ye withdraw your selves from every Brother that walketh disorderly* (out of his Rank or Station, as the Word signifies) *and not after the Tradition, which he received of us.* i. e. Not according to the Rule of the Gospel. And Christians are required to *mark them which cause Divisions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which they have learned, and avoid them*^{2.} But I go on,

3. In admitting others to the Ministry, or *in committing this sacred Trust* to them, let us in like Manner, govern ourselves by the Prescriptions of the Divine Oracles. And that, whether we admit them *occasionally* to officiate in our Congregations, or *statedly* into the Office of the Ministry by Ordination, to a certain Charge. To this Purpose we have full Directions given us in the sacred Oracles, especially in Paul's Epistles to *Timothy* and *Titus*, [which were design'd for a standing Rule to Ministers and Churches to be observ'd inviolably *until the second appearing of our Lord JESUS CHRIST* ;] and that both as to the Qualifications of the Persons to be admitted in-

to the Ministry, and the Nature and Design of their Office ; and being the Guardians of this sacred Treasure, and intrusted with the Dispensation of it, we ought in Faithfulness to guard our People against uninstituted and unqualified Teachers.

Great Complaints have been made of Itinerant Preachers in the Land, and publick solemn Testimonies borne against them (by a great Number of learned and pious Pastors of Churches, in all Parts of the Land) as the Authors of all or most of the Disturbances in our religious Affairs. Others again have countenanc'd and encourag'd them, and highly esteem'd them as eminent Men of GOD, and the happy Instruments of the Revival of Religion among us : But now what say the Oracles of GOD ? Our fallible Reasonings *pro* or *con*, must all cease and end in Silence, when the Oracles of GOD speak. To State the Case, I apprehend this Sort of Men, who are testify'd against by some, and pleaded for by others, are such Preachers, who have no certain Charge (or having deserted it) travel about in a Christian Country (where are Churches regularly constituted under fix'd Pastors and Teachers) from Place to Place, preaching in one Parish and another, where they see meet, under no certain Limitations : Now, if the Oracles of GOD have declared in Favour of such an Officer, and such a Practice in the Christian Church, we must hold our Peace ; and those are greatly to be blamed who have appear'd with so much Zeal against it : But on the other Hand, if no Warrant for such a Practice can be found in the sacred Scripture ; if no such Officer be instituted there, then it is certainly upon right Grounds that both the one and the other are disclaim'd and rejected : For since it depends on the positive Will of the supream Lawgiver to institute Officers and Ordinances in his Church, his giving Commission to some to preach the Gospel, does in the Nature of the Thing exclude others, who have not such Commission, then those of our Reverend Fathers and Brethren, who have born their Testimony against it, are not only to be justified, but highly to be commended as prudent and faithful Watchmen upon our Walls ; and surely their Testimony and Advice deserves to be well pondered and compar'd with Scripture ; yea, and it must also be found Repugnant to it before it be slighted.

And, indeed, setting aside the Consideration of the good or bad Consequences of this Practice of Itinerant Preaching, where do we find the least Footsteps of an Institution in Scripture, for such an unfix'd standing Officer (pardon the Term) in the Christian Church ? Where do we find any other than Pastors and Teachers, otherwise term'd Bishops and Elders, appointed for Continuance in the Church, who

who are limited in their Ordination to particular Churches ^u, with an express solemn Charge to *take heed to the Flock* of which they were made Overseers to rule and *feed* that particular *Flock* of GOD that is intrusted to their Care ^v? Those who undertake to Apologize for any other (for ought that appears) must have recourse to other Topicks, than those of the Bible ; but we insist upon a Divine Appointment of every such Office or Practice in the Church and Worship of GOD, as depends on the positive Will of the Lawgiver, or we are bound in Fidelity to our Charge to reject it. Why did GOD manifest his terrible Displeasure in making *a breach* upon *Uzzab*, when they carried the Ark upon a Cart ? but because (as *David* saith ^x) they *sought* Him *not after a due Order* ; because when the Princes made their Offerings at the Dedication of the Tabernacle of *Waggons* and *Oxen*, there were no Waggons assigned to the Sons of *Kobath*, who had the Charge of the Ark, and were to *bear it upon their Shoulders* ^y. The true Cause of GOD's Anger so fearfully discover'd on that Occasion, was their using Means for carrying the Ark, which he had not appointed ; and in many other Instances he has shewn himself a jealous GOD with respect to his Institutions. [It cannot be a Thing unknown, that the Cause which bro't our pious Forefathers over into this Land was the Religion of the Second Commandment, which in it's general Meaning requires the Ordinances to be observed " pure and entire " and forbids whatever is " not appointed in the Word of GOD ". As to the Positives of Religion, it is not enough to plead in behalf of such an Office, or religious Rite or Usage, that it is not forbidden, or condemned in the Word of GOD ; for if it be not appointed or prescribed therein, we ought not to connive at it as a Thing of a good Meaning or Tendency ; but our Loyalty to the second Commandment requires us to reject it : 'Tis observ'd of the Oracle that deliver'd the Ten Commandments from Mount *Sinai*, with a great Voice, that it *added no more* ^z. Which should be consider'd as a Document to us to observe our Steps, where the Oracle ceases to speak, to rest content with what is prescrib'd ; and, to add no more, what is more than the Wisdom and Authority of GOD has warranted in the Holy Scriptures, is superfluous and superstitious : As therefore when the Apostle left *Titus* in *Crete*, to set in order the Things that were wanting, it was for this end, that he should *ordain Elders in every City* ^a. So having Elders or Gospel Pastors regularly ordain'd in every City, Town, or Church we have what is wanting, supply'd, and all that is wanting in the

^u *Acts* 14. 23. *Tit.* 1. 5. ^w *Acts* 20. 28. ¹ *Pet.* 5. 2. ^x *1 Chron.* 15. 13.
^y *Num.* 7. 9. ^z *Deut.* 5. 22. ^a *Tit.* 1. 5.

divine Estimate for the well-ordering and Edification of the Church ^b. So that these Itinerant Preachers, we are speaking of, where there are such established Officers (to pass a Judgment agreeable to the Tenor of the Divine Oracles) are neither needful nor lawful.] The extensive Commission to the Apostles, *Go, teach all Nations, &c.* is in vain alledged in this Case, unless by or in behalf of those who shall appear furnished with Apostolical Powers in the same Extent; otherwise it were unlawful to confine any Minister to a particular Charge, for by a Commission all Men understand more than a bare Permission, even a Command; but we all well know, that tho' the ordinary Ministers of the Gospel have their Commission originally founded on that given to the Apostles, yet have they it also limited by Apostolical Authority, for we are all built both Ministers and Churches *on the Foundation of the Apostles, &c.* but not to proceed on this Head. — — As to the admitting Persons to the Office of the Ministry by Ordination to a stated Charge, we have that Divine Canon for our Direction, 2 Tim. 2. 2. *The Things that thou hast heard of me among many Witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful Men, who shall be able to teach others also.* Whence I shall infer these Two Things, First, Those therefore who are not *able to teach others*, and consequently cannot be faithful, ought not to have this sacred Trust committed to them, which excludes illiterate (tho' gifted) Brethren from the sacred Office of the Ministry. Again, tho' Men be ever so well qualified for the Ministry, *faithful Men, and able to teach others*, yet they must have it regularly and authoritatively committed to them, before they can lawfully undertake the Discharge of it, which should be a Check to bold Intruders, to them that take this Honour to themselves, and run before they are sent. Thus, having shewed what it is which this solemn Trust obliges us to, in some principal Heads of Duty; I shou'd now proceed to represent our Obligations to the faithful Discharge of it, but that I doubt I have too much wearied your Patience already; let me but briefly suggest a few Considerations. The Nature of this Trust infers an Obligation to Faithfulness, it has been regularly committed to us, and we have not been forc'd (tho' call'd) but have consented of our own Accord to take it upon us: How much Guilt and Dishonour shall we fall under, if we be not found Faithful?

Again, Consider who it is that has committed this Trust to us, whose Honour is concern'd in the Discharge of it, and to whom we are accountable for our Improvement, even our great Lord and

^b Eph. 4. 11, 12.

Master JESUS CHRIST, who has put a great Honour upon us, in calling and putting us into the Ministry, whereby we have peculiar Advantages above other Men for promoting his Honour and Glory. — And he will account Himself honour'd by our Fidelity, whatever our Success be. — And if we be found faithful, *tho' Israel be not gatherd*, yet we shall be glorious in his Eyes. — 'Tis to Him we must give an Account how we have discharg'd this Trust, and he is an Omniscent Judge; His Eye perpetually observes our whole Conduct; he would have all his *Churches* and *Ministers* to know that it is He that *searches the Hearts and the Reins to give unto every one according to their Works*. O what singular Care, what Circumspection and Vigilance is requisite to approve our selves to his Acceptance! — Consider further, the Importance of this Trust, and the important Consequences of our Fidelity herein, with respect to our own Souls, and the Souls of others, and the Interests of GOD's Kingdom in the World. The Salvation and Welfare of the precious immortal Souls committed to our Charge depends upon it, in the Nature of Means. — And hereby we are to consult the Benefit of Posterity, as we are greatly indebted to the Goodness of GOD for the Zeal and Faithfulness of our pious Predecessors, thro' whose Hands the Doctrines of the Divine Oracles have been transmitted to us in their purity, so we are obliged both in Gratitude and Faithfulness to hand them down as a sacred *Depositum*, pure and uncorrupt to those that come after us. — Consider also, that our Fidelity to our Charge will be our Honour and Comfort in Life and Death, and afford a more solid Pleasure in a Sense of Divine Approbation than all the Applauses of the Great and of the Many. This was the great Apostle's Comfort under Apprehensions of his approaching Departure, *I have kept the Faith, kept it as a Trust*. — And when we shall have finished our Testimony, the Glory and Joy reserv'd as the Reward of our Integrity, will be great beyond Expression or Conception, the Commendation of our LORD (with the Acclamations and Applauses of holy Angels) *Well done, good and faithful Servant!* A Crown of Righteousness: A Crown of Life: A Garland of immortal Honour and Joy, which he has promised to them that are *faithful unto Death*^a. These are very great and weighty Arguments; let us conduct ourselves in our Charge under the habitual Influence of them.

Let me but add, The Oracles of GOD being in so solemn and special a Manner committed to our Trust, should be considered and impre-

ved as a Foundation of Union among ourselves, and a powerful and perfwasive Argument to it. If the Apostle improves it as a Ground and Motive to Unity among all Christians that there *is one Faith* ^c. i. e. one Rule of Faith, in which all profess to agree, how much more should it be so to all Gospel Ministers, who have a joint Interest in this one Faith, as being in a more peculiar Manner committed unto them. And let this *one Faith, once delivered unto the Saints,* suffice, as a Foundation of Union [both Christian and Ministerial] *other Foundation can no Man lay.* If we be not so happy as to have the same Sentiments in all Things, as it appears too plainly we are not, in the present troubled State of Religion in our Churches, yet I am perfwaded, we are all agreed in the great and substantial Verities of the Oracles of GOD, and if so, then the Things in which it is possible for us to differ, are but comparatively light and inconsiderable ; and our Agreement in all the weightier Points should swallow up lesser Differences, and teach us mutual Forbearance ; yea, even this mutual Forbearance, is one of the greater Things in which, I trust, we are all agreed, an eminent Branch of the great Law of Love our LORD has injoin'd on all his Disciples ; and let this cause all Distances and Alienations to cease, and suppress all bitterness of Zeal, and prevent its breaking out into open Contests and Oppositions.

I beseech you, Fathers and Brethren, in the Bowels of our Lord JESUS, let no dividing Schemes or distinction of Parties obtain among us ; our Union will be our Glory and Strength ; we all need one another's Strength and Gifts and Graces united in our Defence against the common Danger, especially under the present uncommon Difficulties that attend our religious Affairs. It is scarce to be conceiv'd what Detriment accrues to Religion, what a stumbling to the Weak, what an hardning to the Secure and Profane, what an Advantage to our common Adversary for strengthning the Cause of Infidelity and Vice, and what a Scandal to our Christian Profession, arises from the Disagreement of its Ministers. O let us be Examples to our People of those glorious Christian Virtues of Meekness and Longsuffering, *forbearing one another in Love,* in order to our keeping the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.

My last Inference is, If the Divine Oracles are the chief Advantage and Prerogative of a People, How gloomy and sad is the Condition of such People as are sitting in Darknes for want of this heavenly Light, to whom a sovereign GOD has denied this Privilege ? This is the

State of the Heathen Nations at this Day, and (in a great Degree) of many Nations that go under the Name of *Christians* : And how greatly is it to be pitied ! [And how earnestly should we pray to GOD, that He would send out his Light and his Truth, and remove the Vail of Ignorance and Prejudice, Errors and Superstitions which has overspread so great a Part of Mankind, that his Word may every where run and be glorified ? And that out of an hearty Zeal for the Advancement of the REDEEMER's Kingdom, and out of a compassionate Concern for the Welfare of our perishing Fellow-Creatures.] And very near to the State of Heathens is that of those in the dark Parts of the Land, many of whom it is to be feared have not so much as the Bible among them ; or if they have it in Possession, yet it can't be said that they have the Oracles of GOD in their proper instituted Dispensation committed to them, for want of a sound Gospel-Ministry to teach the Knowledge of them : But the Bible is to them either a sealed Book to their ignorant bewildred Minds, or neglected thro' the Disaffection of their carnal worldly Minds to its holy & spiritual Truths, or perverted through the Influence of the grand Seducer to lead them into pernicious Errors and Delusions. And since it is the Design of the charitable Collections this Day, to encourage and promote the Preaching of the Gospel to such poor ignorant People, and a noble Christian Design it is : Let the Argument we have been discoursing, furnish out a Motive to our Liberality ; for if we know how to value our own Happiness in having the Oracles of GOD committed to us in the ministerial Dispensation of them, as the greatest under Heaven, or have found the Benefit of them to our own Souls, Can we look upon our unhappy Fellow-Creatures, who want these Advantages, without having our Christian Bowels moved towards them ? Or, without contributing what lies in our Power, by our Prayers and Endeavours, and by a generous Distribution of our outward Substance for their Relief ? But to conclude all,

Let this great Privilege of Scripture-Revelation which we enjoy, be improved to the Ends of practical Religion and Holiness : For what is the chief End of the Scriptures, but to direct us in the Way of true Holiness to everlasting Happiness ? And what will it profit us if we fail of this End ? What will our having the Scriptures and Ministry avail us ? Of what Advantage will they be to us above meer Heathens, if we live like them in Ignorance and Wickedness ? If we do not study to answer the Design of GOD in them, they will be so far from being an Advantage, that they will but serve to heighten our Guilt and Condemnation above theirs : Therefore as the Apostle makes the

Jews

Jews Preheminence above the Gentiles to consist in this, that the Oracles of GOD were committed to them ; so he declares in the fore-going Chapter, the impartial Justice of GOD will observe this equitable Proportion in the Infliction of Punishment on evil Doers, that he will render Vengeance to the Jew (the wicked Jew) *first* (chiefly) and also to the Gentile^f. So I may say,—To the wicked Christian *first*, and also to the Infidel : And may I not further add this awful Remark ? —To the ungodly Minister *first*, who is peculiarly intrusted with these holy Oracles, and also to the ungodly Hearer ! O let us all then, both Ministers and Hearers, in reading and studying the Scriptures, in preaching and hearing the Word, always have this great Design in View, even that our Tempers and Lives may be more and more conform'd to the heavenly Light and Purity of this sacred Revelation, that while *with unvailed face, we behold as in a Glass the Glory of the LORD*, we may be *changed into the same Image, from Glory to Glory*, from *Glory* as the Cause, to *Glory* as the Effect, that from *the Glory of the LORD* (which we behold in the Light of the Spirit, shining in the Scripture Revelation of the New-Testament) we may be *changed* into a glorious Similitude thereunto in our own Souls, as *Moses* from the Glory of the LORD, which he beheld (with open Face) on the Mount, receiv'd the likeness of a visible Glory impress'd on his Countenance, which was vail'd to the Children of *Israel*, but this Vail is now done away in *CHRIST*.— Let us heartily Labour and Pray that our Knowledge of the Divine Oracles may have this glorious transforming Efficacy on our Hearts and Lives : Let us yield up ourselves to be guided in this World, by the unerring Counsels and Directions therein given us of GOD, in assured Hope that he will afterward receive us to the Glory of his heavenly Kingdom.

A M E N.

^f Rom. 2. 9.

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E R R A T A.

Pag. 3. Lin. 4. for *further*, read *for the*. P. 6. l. 10. after and add *the*. P. 7. l. 35. r. *clear*. P. 8. after *had* add *of the Oracles*. P. 10. l. 11. r. *Duties*. P. 15. l. 14. for *and reverence*, r. *a reverence of*. l. 17. r. *a Trust*. l. 20. for *Servants*, r. —*Parents*. P. 16. l. 19. for *particular*, r. *peculiar*. P. 25. l. 15 r. *Pandects*. P. 34. l. 4. for *a*, r. *and*. P. 36. l. 35. r. *convictive Reasonings*. P. 37. l. 23. r. *of it*, l. 26. for *it*, r. *them*. P. 45. l. 1. r. *native Majesty*.

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